

THE ULTIMATE

90s

COLLECTION

From the
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ESSENTIAL TV SHOWS & MOVIES

THE GOLDEN AGE OF GAMING

ICONIC MUSICIANS AND GENRES

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THE ULTIMATE 90s COLLECTION

Arguably the best decade of the 20th century, the 90s had it all – fantastic music, iconic movies, timeless TV shows, the best (and worst) of fashion, and some of the greatest toys and games ever created. Packed full of passionate tributes and stunning photography, the Ultimate 90s Collection is a celebration of the decade that brought us Friends, Jurassic Park, Harry Potter, the Super Nintendo, Britpop, the Spice Girls and so much more. Join us as we take a trip down memory lane and revisit the films, albums, videogames, tech, toys, TV shows and clothes that made the 90s so special.



「 FUTURE 」

THE ULTIMATE 90s COLLECTION

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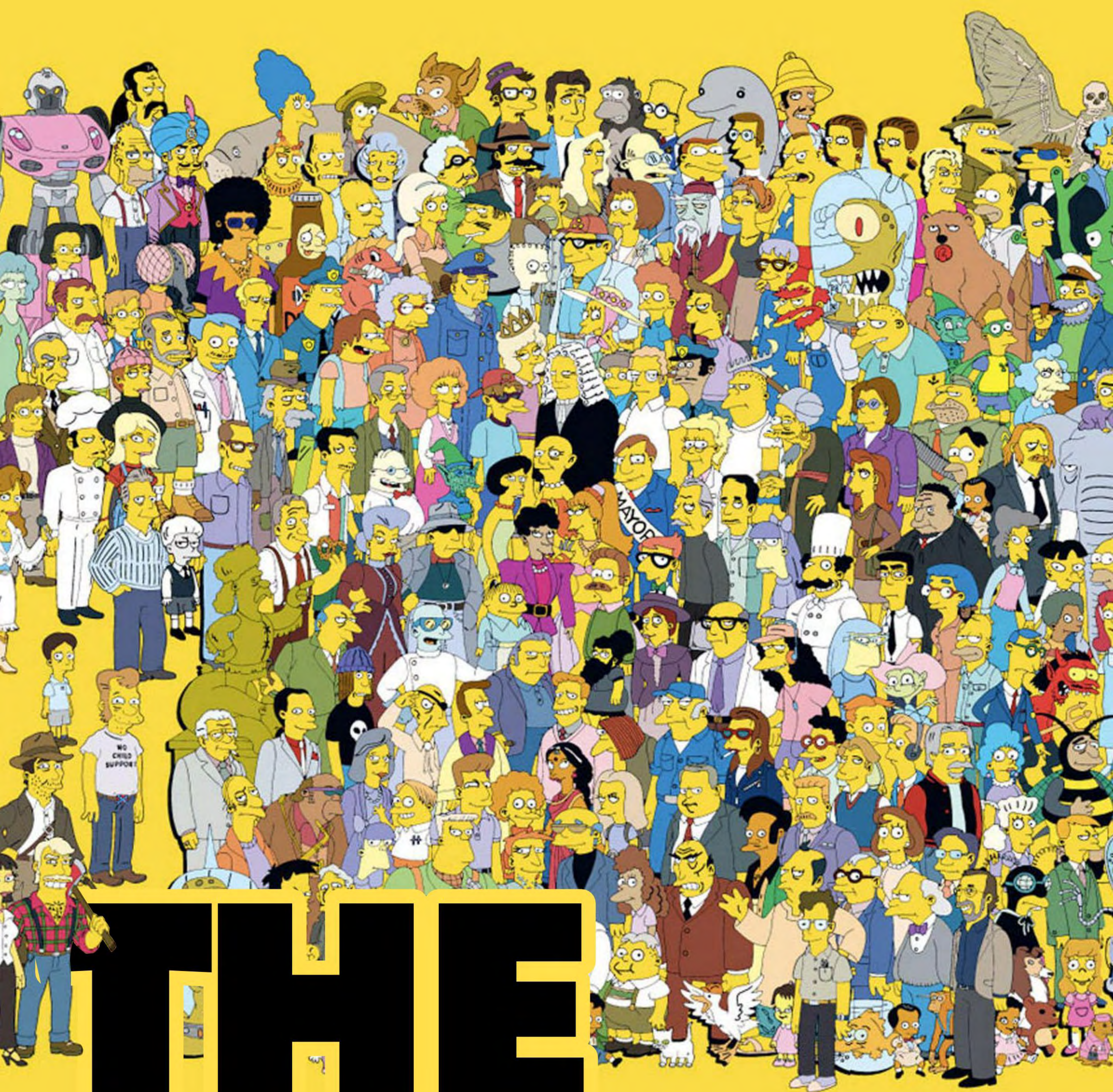
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THE SIMPSO



ONS

How a hastily sketched cartoon family evolved into an iconic TV show, won hearts around the world, and became a pop-culture phenomenon

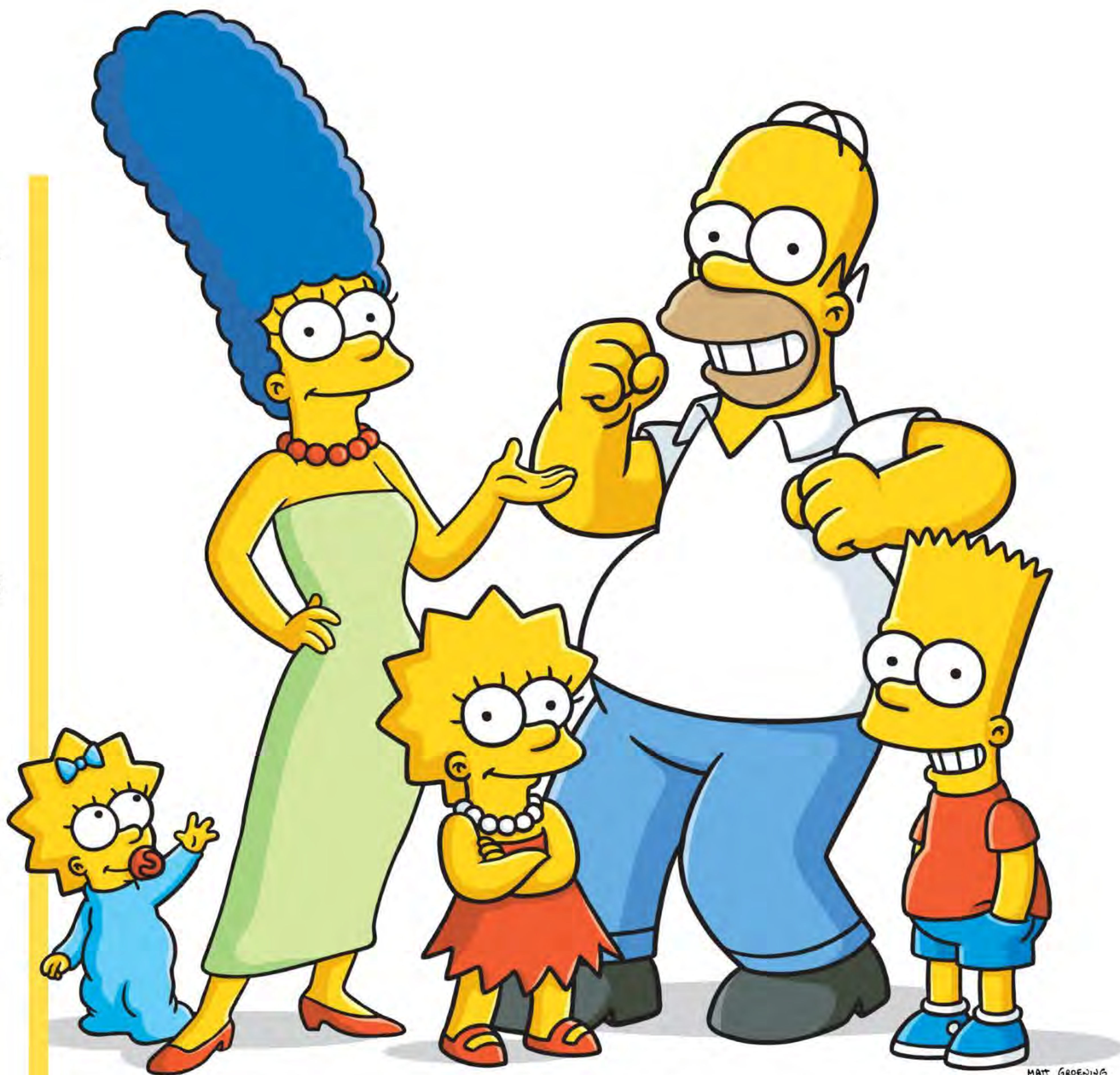
The *Simpsons* is the greatest TV show of all time. It's a cultural touchstone that crosses generational boundaries. A merchandising marvel that's produced T-shirts, pencil cases, videogames, toys, stamps, a feature film, theme park rides and just about anything else you can think of. It's an endless source of internet memes. A treasure trove of quotable lines. The coiner of universally recognised expressive noises like 'd'oh', 'yoink', and 'meh'. A pioneering production that popularised the idea of animation for adults. For all those reasons and more, *The Simpsons* is one of the best things the 1990s produced.

It all started when *Simpsons* creator Matt Groening was contacted by executive producer James L Brooks about making a series of animated shorts based on his long-running *Life in Hell* comic strip for US variety programme *The Tracey Ullman Show*. The story goes that Groening was worried about losing ownership rights for *Life in Hell*, so, while waiting to meet Brooks in his office's lobby, he conceived of and hastily sketched out a dysfunctional family: Homer, the overweight and simple father; Marge, the beehive-sporting anxious mother; Bart, the troublemaker; his smart and socially conscious sister Lisa; and the pacifier-sucking baby, Maggie. On the fly, Groening had created *The Simpsons*. The cast would eventually expand and the family would evolve in look and personality after leaving *Tracey Ullman* behind, but the core of what we now know and love as *The Simpsons* was there.

The Simpsons debuted on *The Tracey Ullman Show* in 1987. It was then picked up by Fox and developed into a full half-hour series, which premiered on TV in the December of 1989. The show quickly became a phenomenon. The series' early success was centred around the popularity of Bart, the world's favourite delinquent. Millions of T-shirts, lunchboxes and other memorabilia featuring Bart were sold, and controversy was generated as schools started banning T-shirts featuring the character due to debates about him being a bad role model.

Bartmania would soon die down, and other Simpson family members were allowed to drift into the spotlight as the show grew in sophistication and ambition. *The Simpsons* found its groove, and its undeniable quality quietened the volume of criticism as the series evolved into the decade's greatest television success.

The Simpsons is still going today, but will always be inextricably linked to the decade that gave us its Golden Age: the 1990s.



TV SHOW

What made us fall in love with a dysfunctional family from Springfield?

When trying to put your finger on what it is that makes *The Simpsons* such a great TV show, it's hard to look past its characters as the starting point. There tended to be a veneer of fakeness about the sitcom families we were exposed to when the show debuted. Despite being bright-yellow cartoon characters, the Simpsons, in contrast, felt uncompromisingly real. Every member of the family is flawed. Their relationships are troubled and the resolutions they reach to overcome their problems often feel patchwork and makeshift. Precisely because the Simpsons aren't idealised, precisely because their relationships are messy and difficult, we can identify with them. We can see their flaws in ourselves and our family members. We can laugh at the way *The Simpsons* brilliantly exposes the reality of family dynamics, without being judgmental, and draw heart from the way that the Simpsons' genuine love for each other keeps them going despite their obvious issues.



TOP 5 FAMOUS FACES

Krusty Gets Busted

Kelsey Grammer

Making the transition from one huge '90s sitcom to another, Kelsey Grammer jumped over from *Frasier* to provide the voice for Sideshow Bob, who has ended up being a popular returning character, usually out to get revenge on Bart for his arrest in the episode *Krusty Gets Busted*.

The Springfield Files

Gillian Anderson and David Duchovny

The X-Files was huge in the '90s, so it was a pretty big deal when David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson showed up as their characters from the show, Fox Mulder and Dana Scully. The pair show up in Springfield to investigate Homer's alleged alien encounter.

Stark Raving Dad

Michael Jackson

The King of Pop sort of played himself, but also not. He played a character who Homer met in a mental institution who believed he was Michael Jackson, called Leon Kompowsky. Due to contractual reasons, Jackson was credited as John Jay Smith, and his involvement in the episode only officially confirmed later.

Lisa's Rival

Winona Ryder

Thanks to starring roles in films like *Beetlejuice*, *Mermaids*, *Edward Scissorhands* and *The Age of Innocence*, Ryder was a huge film star when *The Simpsons* nabbed her to play Allison Taylor, a new student at Springfield Elementary who Lisa becomes jealous of due to her outshining Lisa's academic and musical achievements.

Radio Bart

Sting

Having left The Police to go solo in the mid-1980s, Sting started finding solo success and stardom in the early '90s, as well as a guest appearance as himself where he assisted in freeing Bart from a well. His appearance puts him in good company with other musical guest stars like Aerosmith and George Harrison.

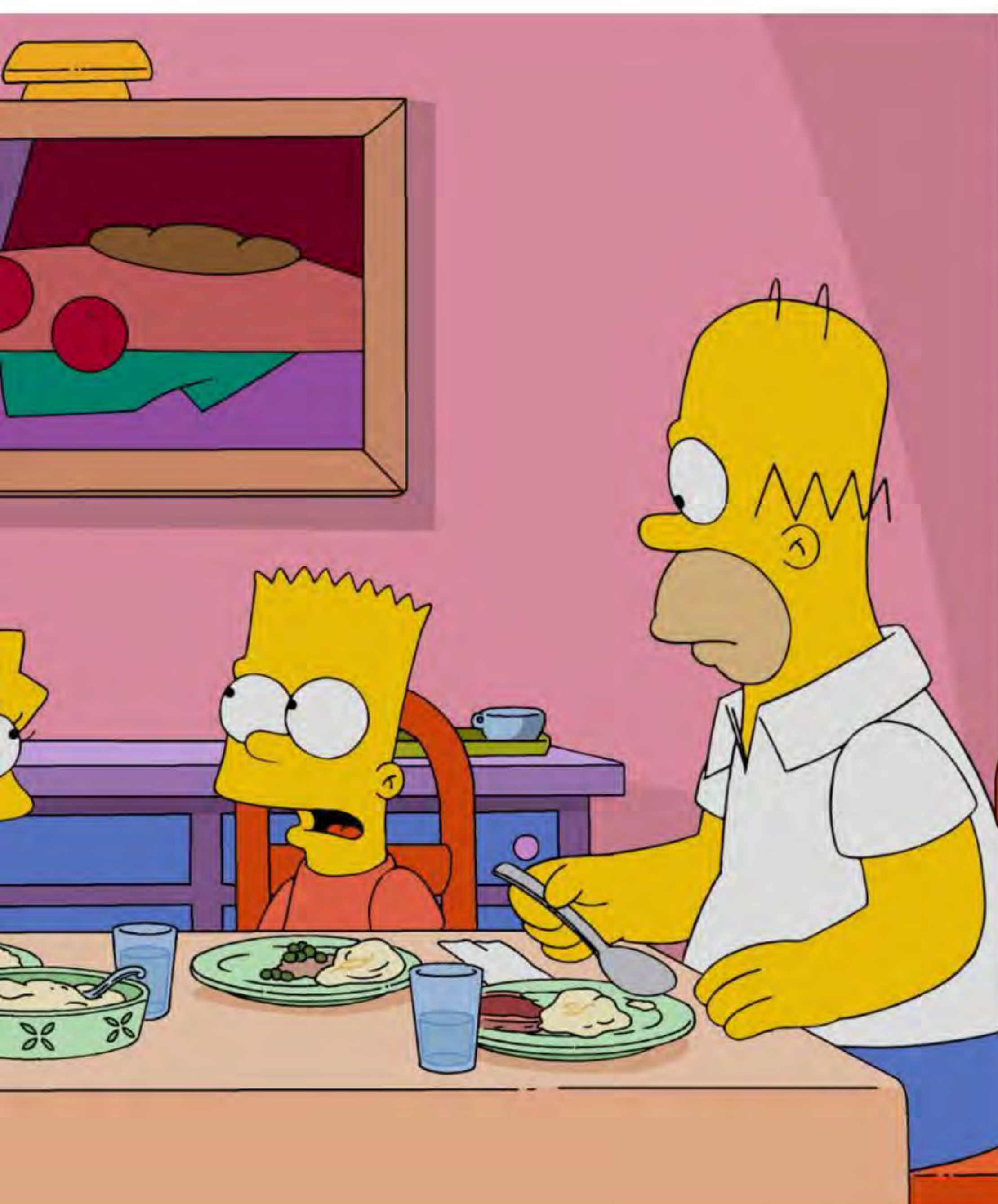
"A savage satire it may be, but let's not forget that *The Simpsons* is also just very funny. It's full of hilarious one-liners"

Of course, *The Simpsons* has a cast of characters that expands far beyond the family. There's God-fearing do-gooder Ned Flanders, sleazebag huckster Lionel Hutz, stereotypical nerd Comic Book Guy, school bully Nelson Muntz and many, many more. Each of them is a hilarious and well-observed caricature. However, they also serve as a lens through which the show brutally satirises the excesses, extravagances and hypocrisies of American culture. Mayor Quimby is used as a vehicle for attacking corruption and greed in politics; Mr Burns is the avatar of the viciousness and

heartlessness of the super-rich; Krusty the Clown's storylines showcase the shallowness and cynicism of the entertainment industry; Chief Wiggum stands in for the police, while Dr Hibbert and Nick Riviera stand in for the medical profession, and Principal Skinner the school system, and so on. Every aspect of society is covered by *The Simpsons*, and it's got something funny and clever to say about every one of them.

A savage satire it may be, but let's not forget that *The Simpsons* is also just very funny. It's full of hilarious one-liners, such as when incompetent attorney Lionel Hutz tells his clients Homer and Marge: "Don't you worry. I've argued in front of every judge in the state... often as a lawyer!" It has an ear for playing with language in ticklingly pleasurable ways, like when good-hearted simpleton Ralph Wiggum exclaims: "Me, fail English? That's impossible." Or when Moe chides Lisa's scepticism about a fossilised angel by saying: "If you're so sure what it ain't, how about tellin' us what it am." The series has impeccable timing when it comes to physical comedy, too. It's full of great slapstick humour, with the buffoonish Homer often bearing the bumps and bruises in the name of our entertainment.

The Simpsons is a comedy that can do it all. It can be earnest and heart-warming, deliver razor-sharp satire, deconstruct the psychology of individuals in hilarious and insightful ways, and be silly and slapstick. It's given us moments we'll never forget, from monorail mania to secret societies, Halloween specials to *Bond* parodies. The Simpson family and the citizens of Springfield will forever be in our hearts.





"You can find a Simpsons version of pretty much every famous board game"



TOYS

Memorabilia madness brings The Simpsons to toy-store shelves and high-street racks

Given that early *Simpsons* fever was centred around Bart, it's no surprise that merchandising efforts began by cashing in on the spikey-haired rebel's popularity. A talking Bart Simpson doll was one of the first examples of *Simpsons* toys. It would spout catchphrases like "Don't have a cow, man!" and "Ay caramba!" Alongside the dolls, Bart Simpson T-shirts were an essential for the '90s kid. You couldn't go anywhere without seeing an image of him saying 'eat my shorts' on the T-shirts of passers-by, or hanging from racks in the shops. We're pleased that the *Simpsons* series soon realised it could do better than rely on catchphrases, but they proved valuable in the early days of shifting Bart merch.

Of course, the rest of the family got in on the act too. In the early days, there were figures of the whole family produced by Acme and DanDee, which, probably unintentionally, replicated the slightly shoddy nature of the TV series' early seasons. As the show's popularity grew, *Simpsons* merch started becoming

available through cross-brand promotional campaigns. Burger King had a set of *Simpsons* figures available in the early '90s, for example, and Kellogg's gave away *Simpsons* cake toppers in Canada. The '90s ended on a high when it comes to *Simpsons* figures, with the first release of the World of Springfield series. World of Springfield is a series of action figures and accompanying playsets based on the TV show, made with a quality and detail that was lacking in some of the decade's early efforts. This line would eventually include over 200 characters from the series, including the likes of Hans Moleman, Disco Stu and Rainier Wolfcastle, 40 playsets based on locations from the town like the nuclear power plant, Moe's Tavern and Springfield Elementary, and even a couple of vehicles – the Simpsons' family car and the school bus driven by Otto. There was also a set of celebrity guest figures released to celebrate the series' 25th anniversary, including figures of Leonard Nimoy, Stephen King, and Bret Hart. You can also get Lego sets based on *The Simpsons*, including a faithful re-creation of the Simpsons' family home.

Simpsons merch extends well beyond the world of figures and dolls. You can find a *Simpsons* version of pretty much every famous board game, including *Simpsons* chess, *Simpsons* Monopoly, *Simpsons* Cluedo, *Simpsons* Scrabble and *Simpsons* Pictionary. There are also *Simpsons* board-game versions of TV quiz shows, like *The Simpsons* Jeopardy and *Simpsons* Wheel of Fortune. Then there are original *Simpsons* games. In the Don't Have a Cow Dice Game, you roll cubes with pictures of the Simpsons on them to try and match combinations, like the three Simpson kids, while betting against each other. Then there is Hungry Homer, a game where you must roll a dice that determines the size of the donut you can take away for poor Hungry Homer. Eventually, he'll lose his patience and send all the donuts flying to end the game. Inevitably, *The Simpsons* also has *The Simpsons* Board Game, where the goal is to be the character with the most trash on the living-room rug.

Then, there is the miscellanea. The *Simpsons* dartboard and skateboards, the Bart Simpson phone, the Homer egg cup, *The Simpsons*-themed stationery, and all manner of other memorabilia. If you can think of it, there's probably a *Simpsons* version out there.





MEDIA

Conquering the entertainment world, from chart-topping success to venerated videogames



The Simpsons: Bart & the Beanstalk received mixed reviews when it was released on Nintendo's Game Boy in 1994.

The swift success of *The Simpsons* led to the series branching out into other media. A slew of *Simpsons* books were published in the early '90s, kicking off with *Greetings from The Simpsons*, *The Simpsons Xmas Book* and *The Simpsons Rainy Day Fun Book*. These books ranged from those that let you delve deeper, like *The Simpsons Uncensored Family Album* – which featured family trees of the Simpson and Bouvier families, baby photos of Homer and Marge, and the documenting of the lives of their children – to books aimed at a younger audience, like *Maggie Simpson's Book of Animals*.

In 1993, creator Matt Groening founded a comic book company called Bongo Comics to publish *Simpsons*-themed comics. Obviously, this includes a comic book series based on *The Simpsons*, but there was also an *Itchy & Scratchy* series, a Bartman series based on Bart's superhero alter-ego, and even a series

on Radioactive Man, transforming a fictional comic book hero within the *Simpsons* universe into a comic book hero in the real world.

As we've mentioned Bartman, we should also touch on the series' brief flirtation with the music industry. In 1990, a *Simpsons* album called *The Simpsons Sing the Blues* was released, featuring songs performed by Homer, Marge, Bart and Lisa. *Do the Bartman* was released as a single from the album, making it to Number 1 in the UK, New Zealand, Norway, Ireland and Australia.

As if conquering TV, publishing and music wasn't enough, *The Simpsons* also delved into the world of videogames. The first game based on the series remains one of the better *Simpsons* games: *The Simpsons: Bart vs. the Space Mutants*, released on NES, Master System and a variety of other systems. The game was a 2D side-scrolling platformer where you, playing as Bart, had to thwart an alien invasion using Bart's X-ray specs to spot aliens hiding in human form.



The Simpsons took to the arcades as well as home consoles. *The Simpsons* arcade game was a side-scrolling beat 'em up released in 1991 where up to four players could take control of Homer, a Hoover-wielding Marge, a skipping rope-swinging Lisa and a skateboard-riding Bart, to battle against enemies and save the kidnapped Maggie. It was a brilliantly vivid re-



“As if conquering TV, publishing and music wasn’t enough, *The Simpsons* also delved into the world of videogames”



creation of the town of Springfield and its varied cast of characters.

There are too many *Simpsons* videogames to list them all, safe to say there’s a varied collection out there, including an *Itchy & Scratchy* golf game released for the Game Boy in 1994; a 1992 game where you had to exterminate rats while playing as Krusty the Clown, called *Krusty’s Fun House*; and a beautifully detailed PC point-and-click adventure released in 1997 that let you explore all of Springfield’s famous locales and interact with your favourite characters, called *Virtual Springfield*.

When it comes to *Simpsons* games, be wary of the fact that the quality varies wildly. *The Simpsons Wrestling* for the original PlayStation and *The Simpsons Skateboarding* on PS2 are a couple of examples of notoriously terrible *Simpsons* titles. However, there are some good ones out there. Along with the aforementioned *Simpsons* arcade game, GTA clone *The Simpsons: Hit & Run*, the unimaginatively titled *The Simpsons Game*, and *Crazy Taxi* rip-off *The Simpsons: Road Rage* are all fun to play.

It was always going to be impossible for *The Simpsons* to hit the same level of quality as it did with its ground-breaking TV show in other mediums (we’re looking at you, *Do the Bartman*). Still, between the books, the comics and the videogames, there’s some great *Simpsons* spinoff media to enjoy.



▲ *The Simpsons: Bart Vs. The Juggernauts* was a Game Boy-exclusive release, which came out in 1992.





Travis 'Bart' McNall has been collecting Simpsons memorabilia for nearly 30 years.



THE SIMPSONS SUPERFAN

Simpsons fan Travis 'Bart' McNall talks us through his colossal collection of Simpsons memorabilia



How did you first get into *The Simpsons*?

I first saw *The Simpsons* as shorts on *The Tracey Ullman Show* on 19 April 1987. I'm not sure if I've seen them all. Then I heard that they were having a Christmas special on 17 December 1989. I watched it then. Then I heard that they were having regular episodes airing. I did what most people would do and watched a few episodes to see if it was worth it to keep watching. By that March, I got hooked. I like *The Simpsons* for the humour. Bart Simpson has and always will be my favourite *Simpsons* character.

How did you get into collecting *Simpsons* merchandise?

When I got hooked on the show, I saw some *Simpsons* merchandise in stores. I really wanted to buy them. But, at the time, I was too young to be working. I'm thinking I got one of my first items at a local pharmacy/

drug store that sold some toys. It was a Bart Simpson doll from DanDee. For Christmas 1990, *Simpsons* items are pretty much all the material gifts that I got that year.

What are some of your favourite items in your collection?

My current favourite item is a life-sized plush Bart Simpson doll. One of the other favourite items that I have (that I can think of) is a reproduction animation cel from the 100th episode. Only 2,500 were made. I have some Bart Simpson T-shirts that I really like, some of which I wear today and some I keep in mint or near-mint shape. Also, I have some unopened Bart Simpson action figures and some *Simpsons* books in different languages.

Are there rare items missing from your collection that are tricky to get hold of?

Yes. The number-one item that I'm looking for to add to my *Simpsons* collection is a Bart Simpson theme park costume. The very one used at Universal Orlando Resort or Universal Studios Hollywood. Also, I'd like to get an actual *Simpsons* animation cel, with the whole family or just Bart in a decent pose. I'd like to be in a *Simpsons* episode as a big fan and collector of the 'I didn't do it boy', and actually talk to Bart himself.

Do you think you'll ever run out of *Simpsons* items to collect?

Right now, I'm not sure. I only collect the clean *Simpsons* items. I won't collect anything that's dirty [rude]. If they still make and release anything clean, I plan to collect it. Right now (in the US) I haven't really seen anything new except for some comics and some T-shirts; nothing big.

"Bart will always be my favourite Simpsons character"



His collection features over 3,900 pieces of Simpsons memorabilia, including toys, dolls, books, art, and clothing.



Of all his items, Travis's current favourite piece of memorabilia is his life-sized plush doll of Bart Simpson.



Travis hopes to one day feature as an avid fan and collector in an episode of The Simpsons, alongside his favourite character Bart.



The next item on Travis's list is a Bart Simpson theme park costume used at Universal Orlando Resort or Universal Studios Hollywood.





90

FILMS THAT DEFINED THE '90s

Take a trip down memory lane with the very best films that defined a generation

Box office became a big deal during the '90s, with many of the decade's biggest hitters effortlessly surpassing the \$500 million mark that the films of the '80s failed to dent. 13 films smashed the barrier with ease, while *Titanic* went one better, earning over \$1.843 billion.

Money wasn't the only thing that was changing: audiences' tastes were, too. Horror movies that had been hugely popular during the '80s began to fade, only returning later in the decade, while gross-out comedies like *There's Something About Mary* and *Dumb and Dumber* found new audiences. The runaway success of Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* reignited interest

in crime capers, while *Dances with Wolves* and *Unforgiven* are largely responsible for making Westerns fashionable again.

While action stars like Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger no longer dominated the box office like they did in the '80s, they still managed to make an impact with films like *Terminator 2* and *Cliffhanger*. Ultimately, however, it was Tom Hanks and Tom Cruise who would become some of the biggest stars of the decade, with Hanks winning two best actor Oscars back to back, a feat that hadn't been achieved in the category since Spencer Tracey in 1938.

So join us as we look at some of the decade's most enduring films.



Ghost

1990

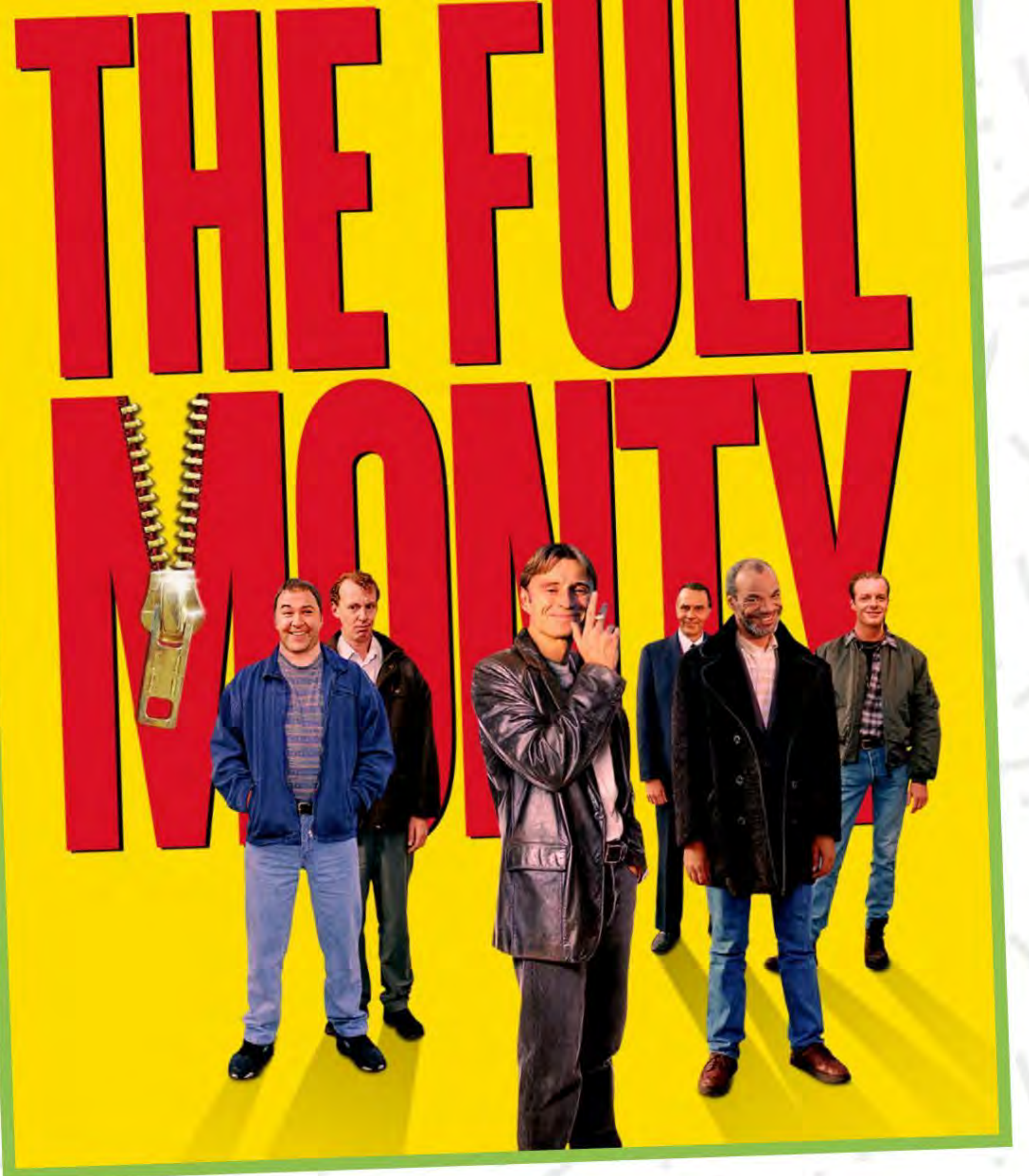
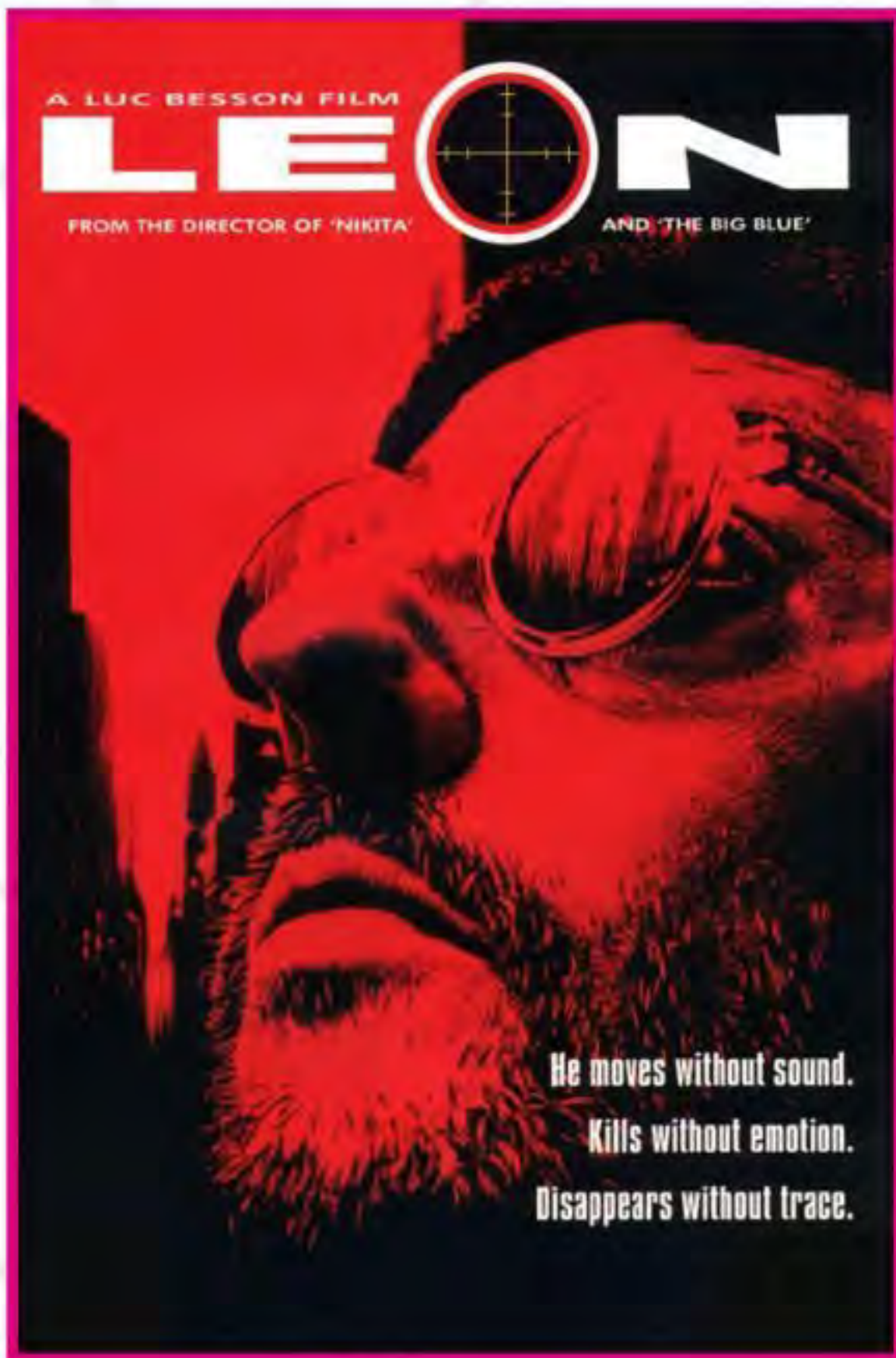
1 The highest-grossing film of 1990 made Patrick Swayze and Demi Moore mega stars, and even earned Whoopi Goldberg an Oscar for best supporting actress the following year. Its iconic potter's-wheel scene has been parodied countless times over the decades, while its theme tune, *Unchained Melody*, turned out to be a big hit for the Righteous Brothers 35 years after it was first recorded.



Léon

1994

2 Luc Besson's unlikely tale of a hitman who takes in an orphaned girl works largely thanks to sensational performances from Jean Reno as the childlike hitman, Gary Oldman's unhinged dirty cop, and a powerhouse debut from a then 12-year-old Natalie Portman. Oozing style, the available director's cut further explores the main characters' complex relationship, which is fascinating.



▲ The Full Monty

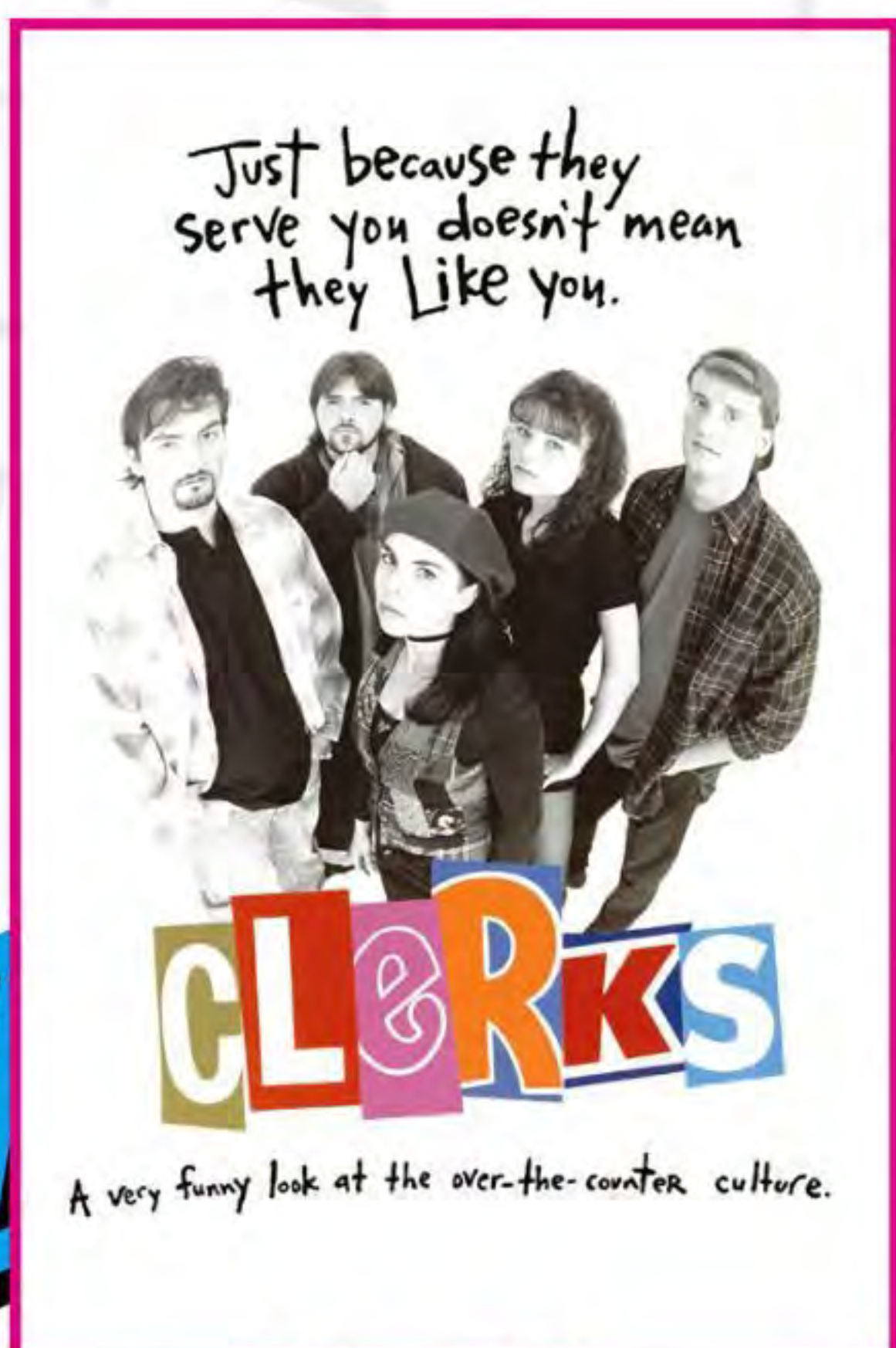
1997

3 Who would have thought a group of unlikely unemployed men becoming strippers would have performed so well at the box office? Made for a paltry \$3.5 million, it netted \$258 million at the box office, kickstarted the career of Mark Addy, and led to a play and Broadway musical.

Clerks

1994

4 Kevin Smith's debut film was shot in the convenience store where he actually worked, and was made for a meagre \$27,525. It cemented him as one of the leading indie directors of the '90s, though, and helped to create the View Askewniverse – the fictional universe that would link many of Smith's later films. A sequel was released in 2006.



Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves

1991

5 Never mind the fact that this is another dubious Hollywood portrayal of the popular English folk hero; let's remember Alan Rickman's hilariously hammy portrayal of the Sheriff of Nottingham and Bryan Adams' *(Everything I Do) I Do It For You*.



There's Something About Mary

1998

6 The highest-grossing comedy of the year catapulted Ben Stiller and Cameron Diaz to the top of Hollywood, and proved the Farrelly brothers had no bounds when it came to the pursuit of comedy. Amazingly, Bill Murray was originally considered for the sleazy role of Pat Healy.



Mrs Doubtfire

1993

7 He wasn't able to topple Spielberg's dinos, but Robin Williams' performance of a failing actor who dresses up as the curmudgeonly Mrs Doubtfire in order to see his children still did gangbusters at the box office. While a sequel was still in development as late as 2014, Williams' tragic death that same year inevitably means it is now permanently cancelled.





Terminator II: Judgment Day

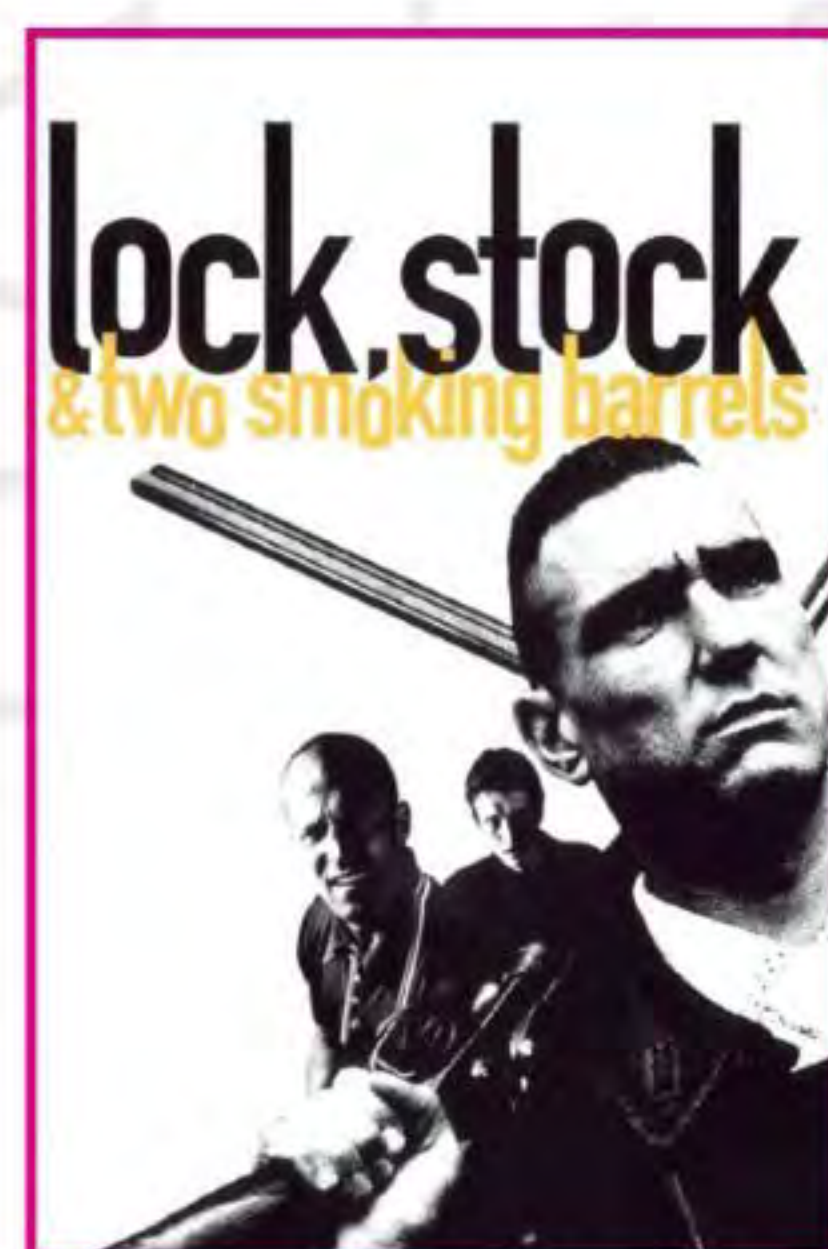
1991

8 James Cameron's second pairing with Arnold Schwarzenegger generated over \$523 million to become the year's top hit. While it's remembered for its (then) cutting-edge visuals, Arnie's clever role-reversal and the introductions of Edward Furlong and Robert Patrick, it's the transformation of Linda Hamilton into a highly trained killing machine that leaves the biggest impression.

Lock, Stock & Two Smoking Barrels

1998

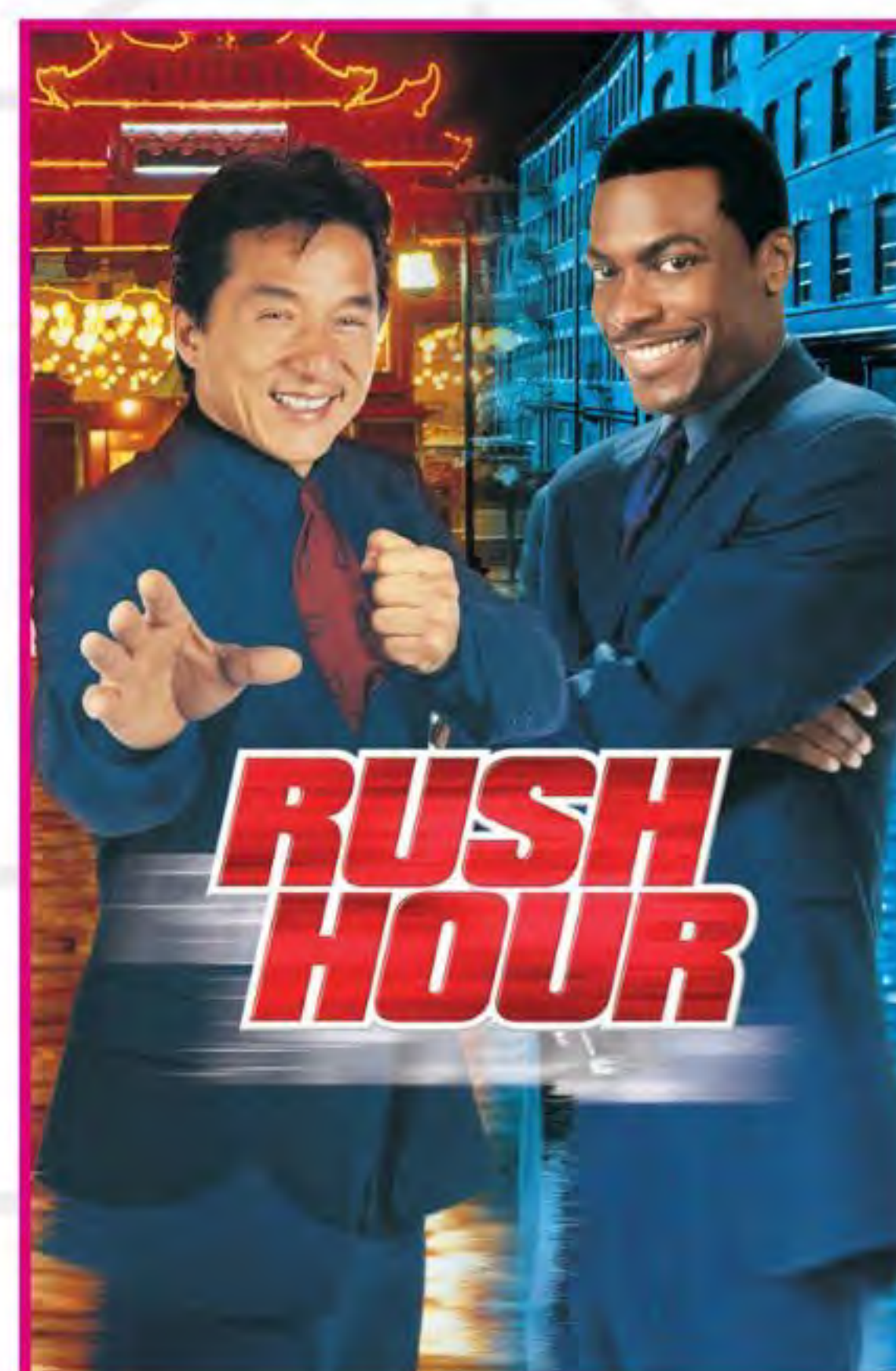
9 Guy Ritchie's comedy crime caper led to a marriage with Madonna, turned Jason Statham into one of Hollywood's biggest action stars, and launched the unlikely acting career of footballer Vinnie Jones. It's an excellent crime story, which convinced Sting it was worth returning to acting (it wasn't).



Rush Hour

1998

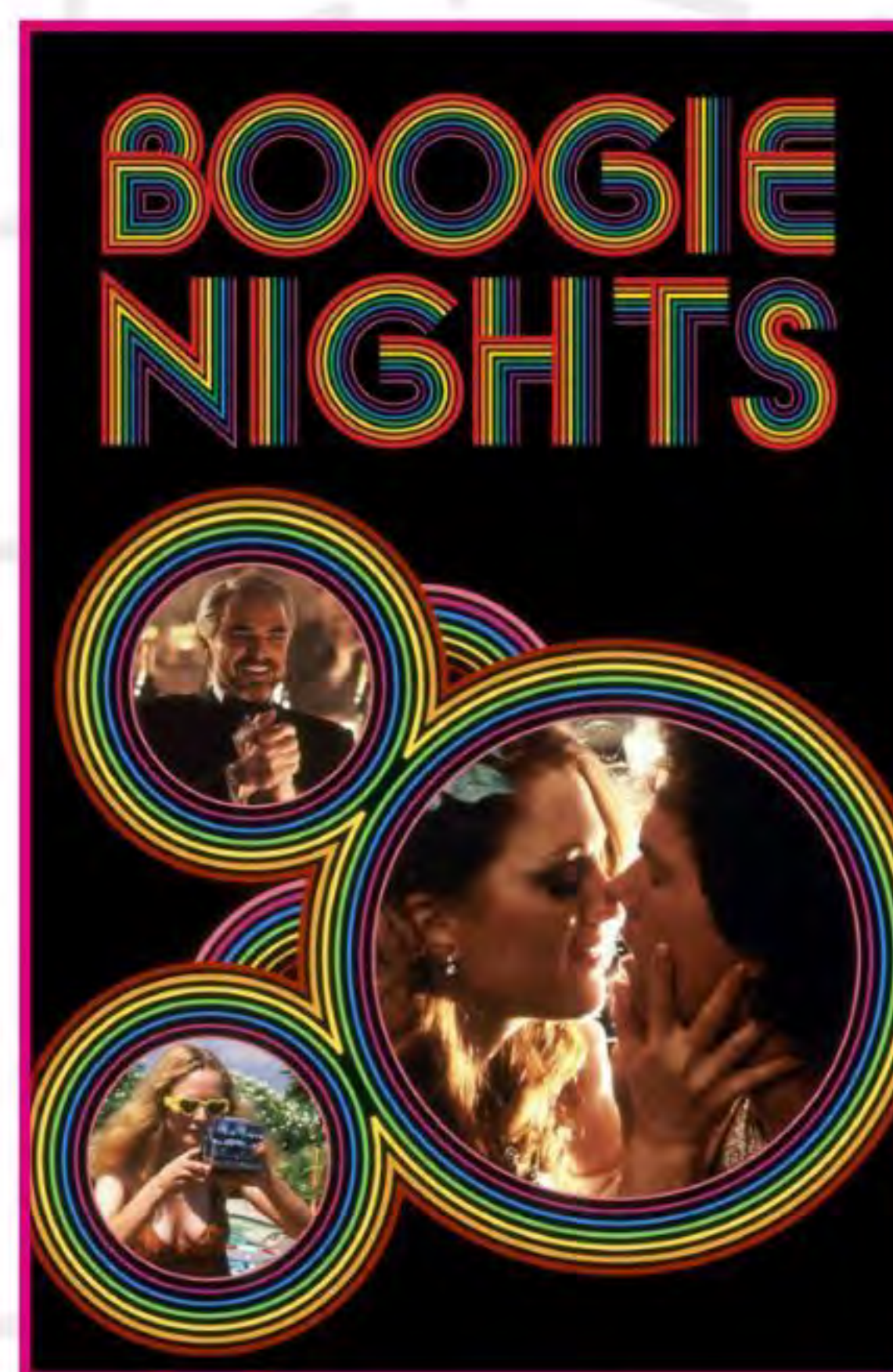
10 Jackie Chan's first big western blockbuster saw him teaming up with the smart-mouthed Chris Tucker for a fairly formulaic take on the buddy action genre. Despite some rather lacklustre reviews, it still made \$244 million off a \$33 million budget, leading Newline to commission two sequels in 2001 and 2007. A fourth movie is allegedly in the works.



Boogie Nights

1997

12 Paul Thomas Anderson's focus on the porn industry of San Fernando Valley reinvented Marky Mark as a serious actor, and featured a career-defining role from Burt Reynolds. It has arguably got the best ensemble cast of the decade (with *Magnolia* possibly just edging it), and a killer soundtrack that spawned two albums.



GoldenEye

1995

11 After a six-year break, Martin Campbell was tasked with rebooting *James Bond*. It turned out to be a very smart move, generating more than \$350 million at the box office. Pierce Brosnan shines as the sultry spy, while Dame Judi Dench becomes the perfect foil for him as his new boss, M. It's only real let down by Sean Bean's somewhat weak villain.



Unforgiven

1992

13 Clint Eastwood's love letter to the Westerns that made him so iconic scored big at the Oscars, winning four awards, including best picture, director and supporting actor for Gene Hackman's frightening performance as 'Little' Bill Daggett. Eastwood himself plays brilliantly against type, until the final showdown turns him into every violent character he's ever played.





Speed

1994

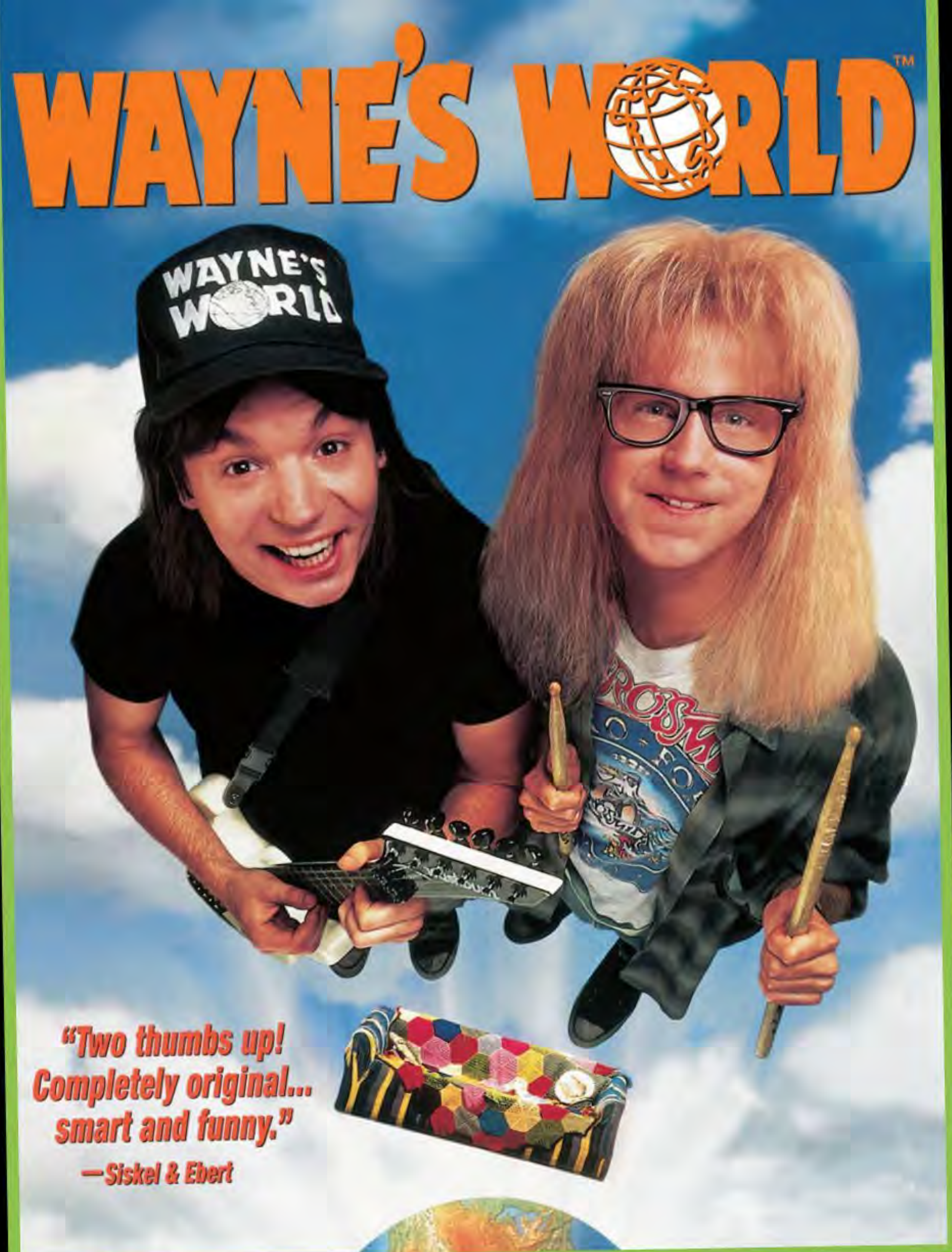
14 Described on release as 'Die Hard on a bus', the directorial debut of cinematographer Jan de Bont remains an epic action movie today. *Speed* features a crazy turn by Dennis Hopper, helped further the blossoming career of a then largely unknown Sandra Bullock, and of course had everyone talking about Keanu Reeves' sexy new haircut. A true classic from the decade.



The Muppet Christmas Carol

1992

15 If you only ever watch one Christmas film starring muppets and Michael Caine, then make sure it's this one. While it didn't do big business at the box office upon its release, Brian Henson's movie has become a real Christmas favourite thanks to some killer jokes and a 'bah humbug' performance from Caine.



Wayne's World

1992

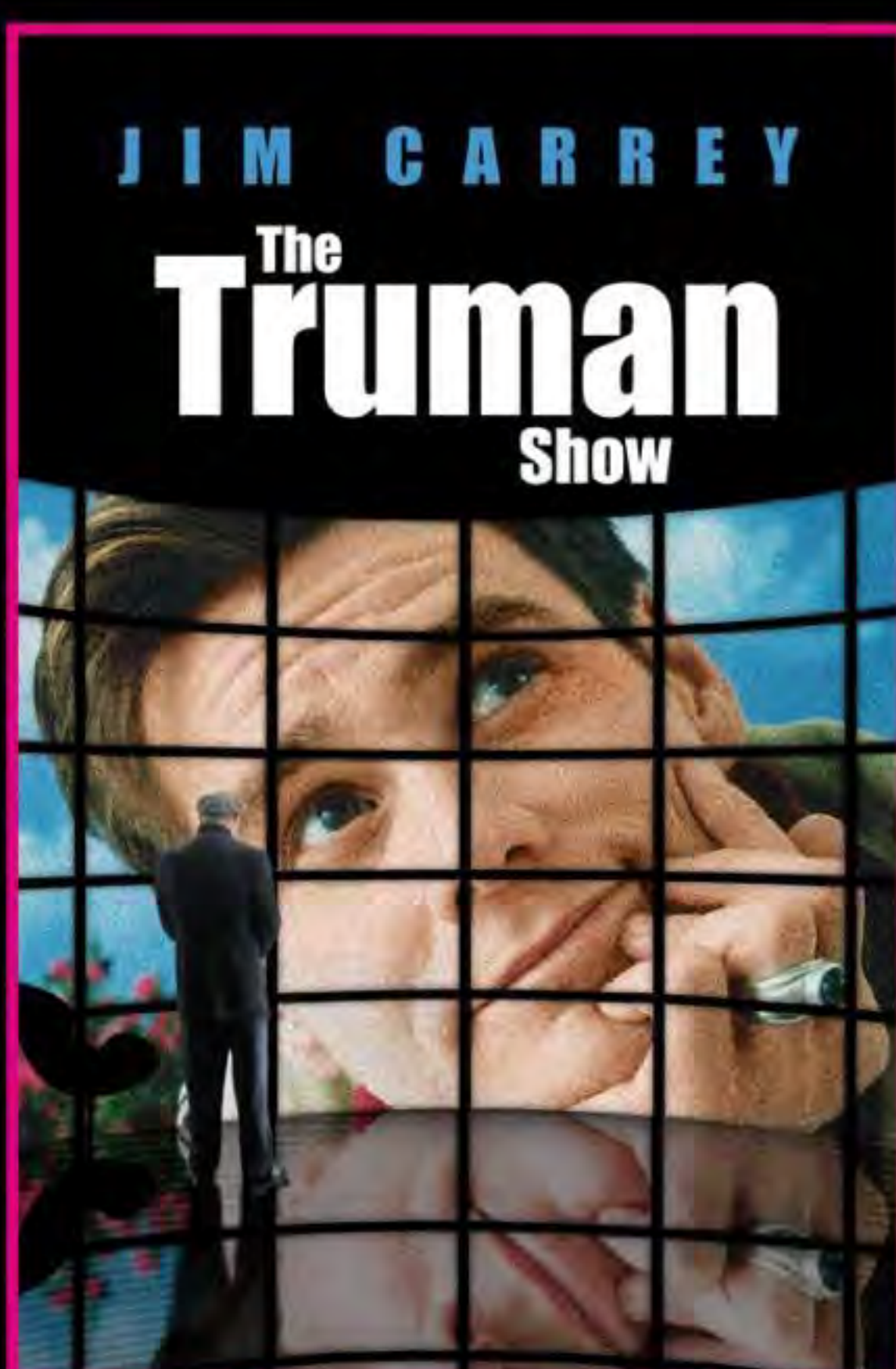
16 Mike Myers' Saturday Night Live sketch show became a monstrous cinematic hit that had everybody swinging and hurling upon its release. Notable for a huge number of cameos, which included Meat Loaf, Alice Cooper and Jimmy DeGrasso, its box-office success led to a less-than-impressive sequel the following year.



The Blair Witch Project

1999

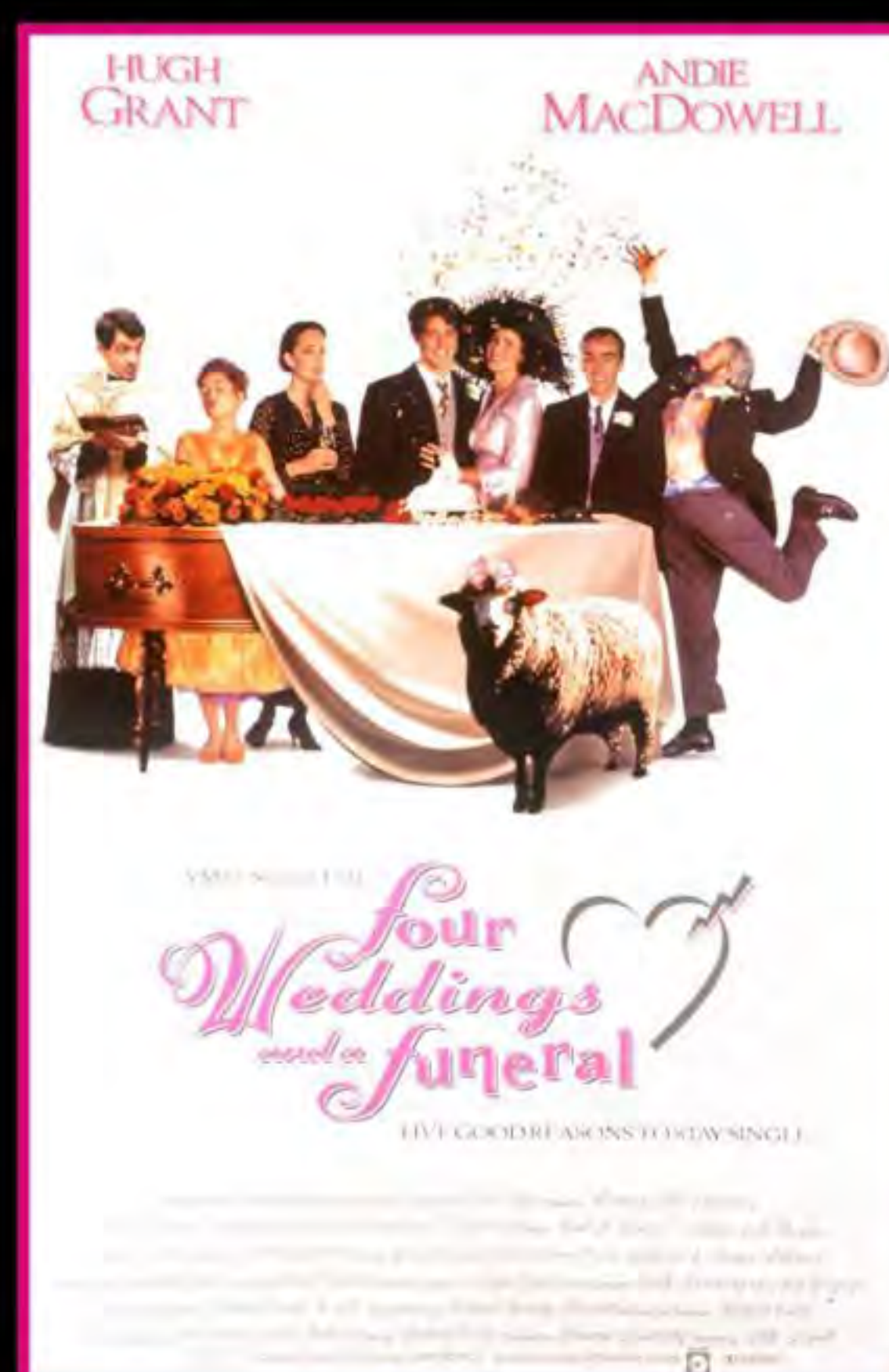
17 This chilling horror was notable for numerous reasons. It made 'recovered footage' films popular, and was arguably the first example of viral marketing, with many being led to believe it was a true story thanks to clever websites available on its release. It's plagued by poor sequels.



The Truman Show

1998

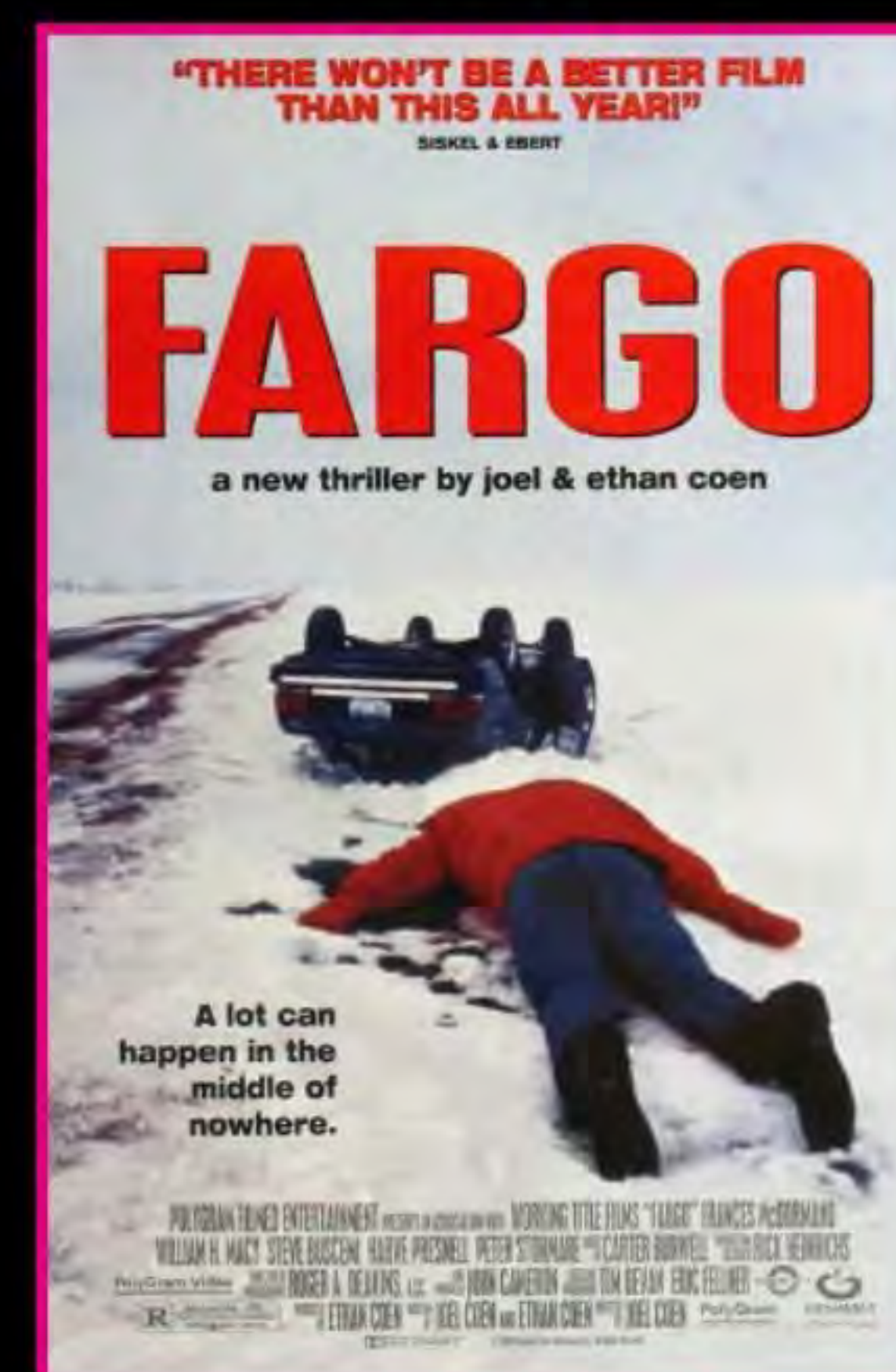
18 Eerily predicting the world's current obsession with trashy reality TV, *The Truman Show* proved that Jim Carrey was more than capable of simply gurning his way through a film, and is arguably his finest performance. Ed Harris shines too, as the creator of Truman's fake universe.



Four Weddings and a funeral

1994

19 Nobody plays a lovable, bumbling buffoon like Hugh Grant does. Mike Newell's romantic comedy was not only a massive success on both sides of the Atlantic, but also led to Wet Wet Wet's cover of The Troggs' *Love Is All Around*, which topped the UK charts for 15 consecutive weeks.



Fargo

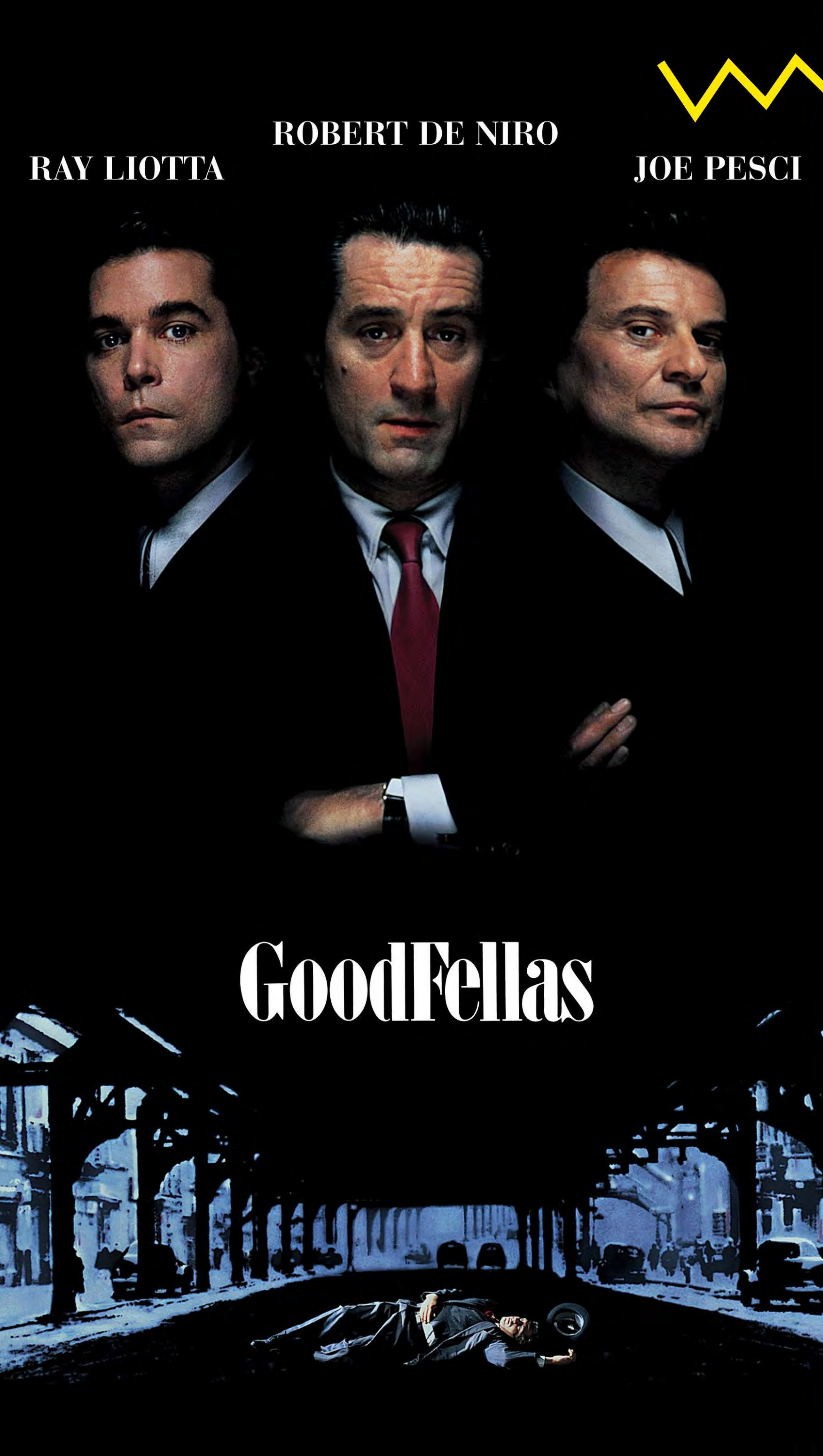
1996

20 This fine effort from the Coen brothers earned them an Oscar for best original screenplay. Frances McDormand also won an Oscar for her portrayal of a pregnant police officer who investigates the brutal murders that take place in a sleepy Minnesota town. A TV series set in the same universe was released in 2014.

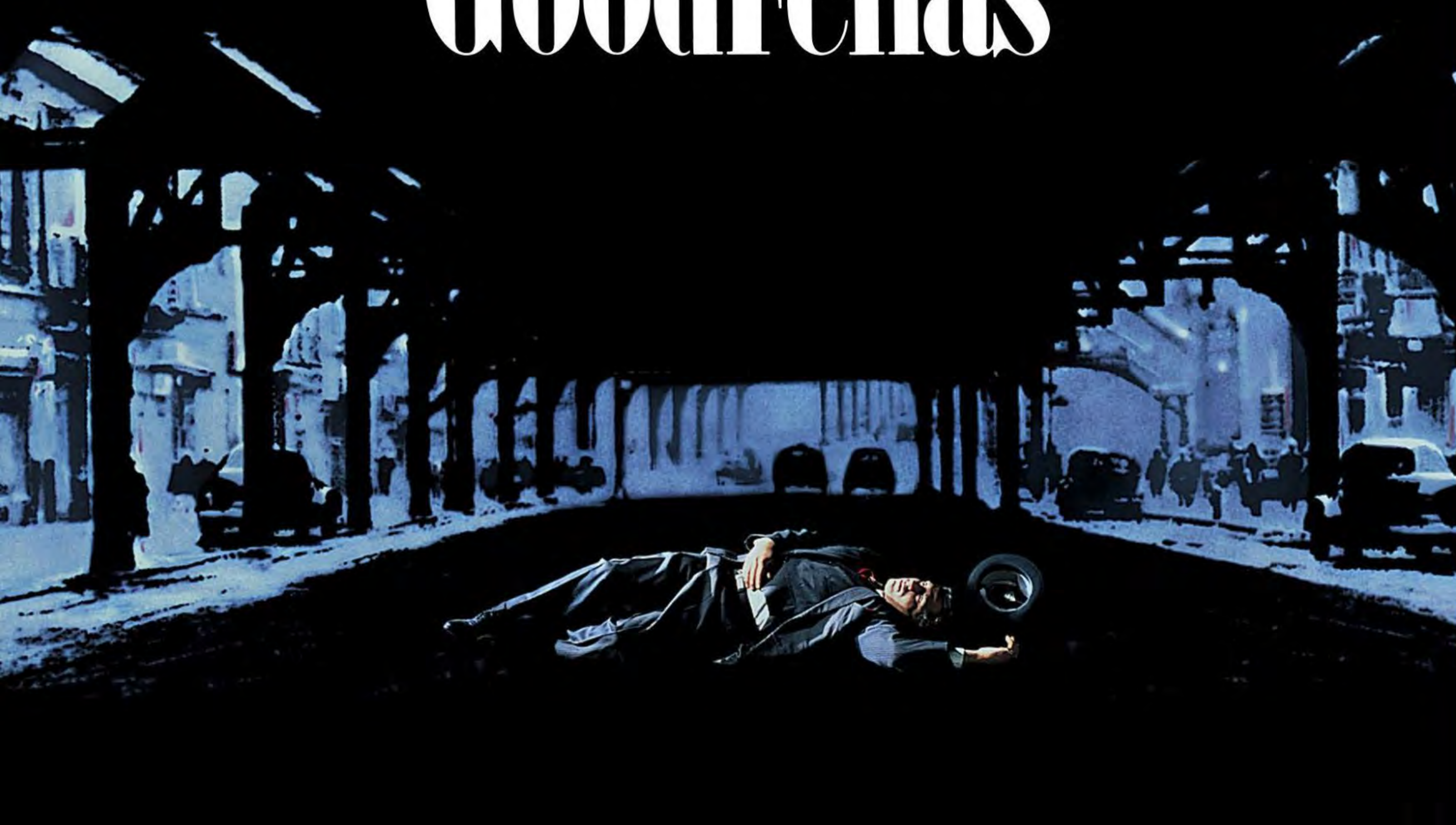
RAY LIOTTA

ROBERT DE NIRO

JOE PESCI



GoodFellas

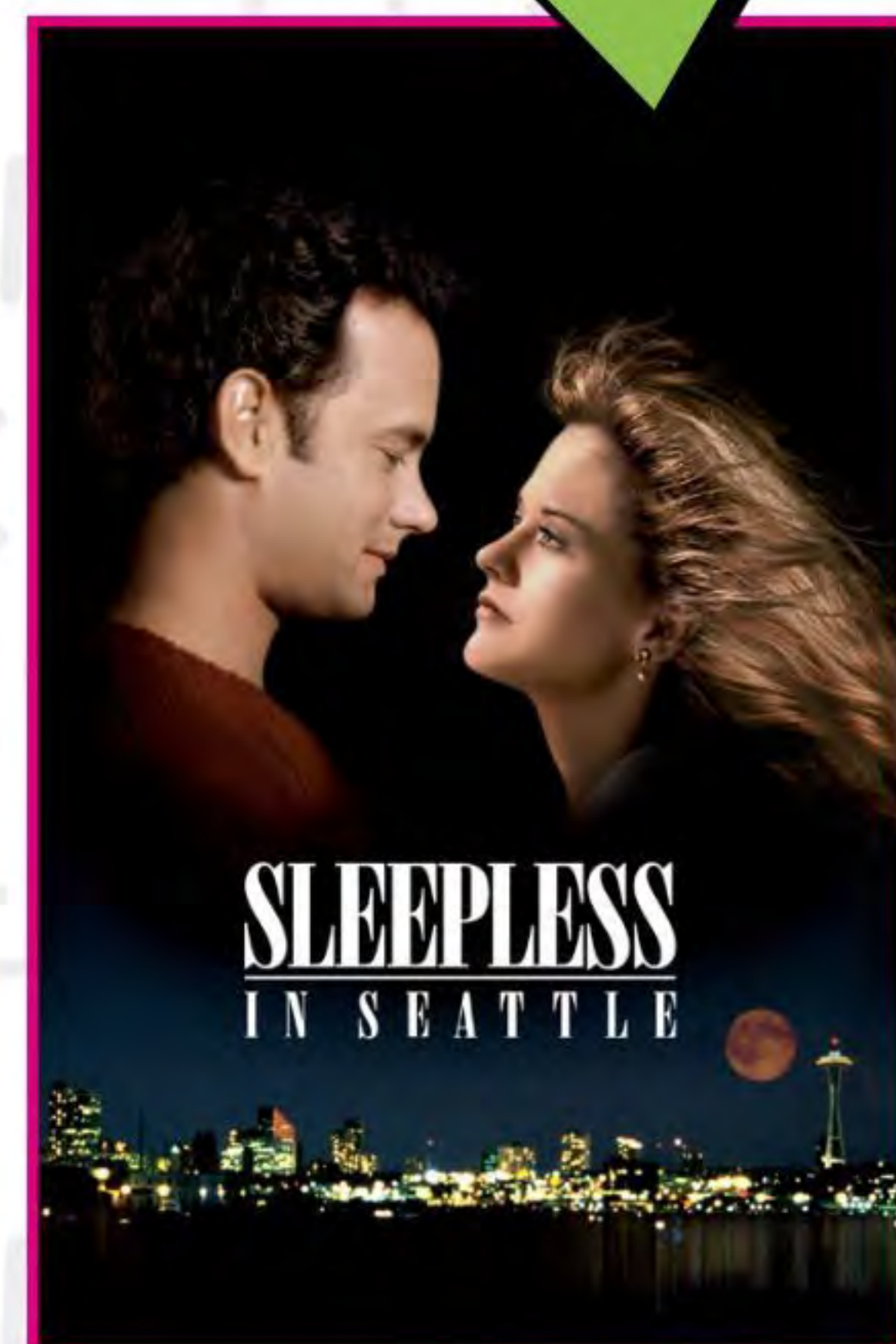


Goodfellas

1990

21

Martin Scorsese's best film of the '90s works thanks to the excellent source material (it's based on Nicholas Pileggi's *Wiseguy*) and three powerful performances from Joe Pesci, Robert De Niro and Ray Liotta. Oh, and it's got one of the coolest tracking shots of all time. So there!



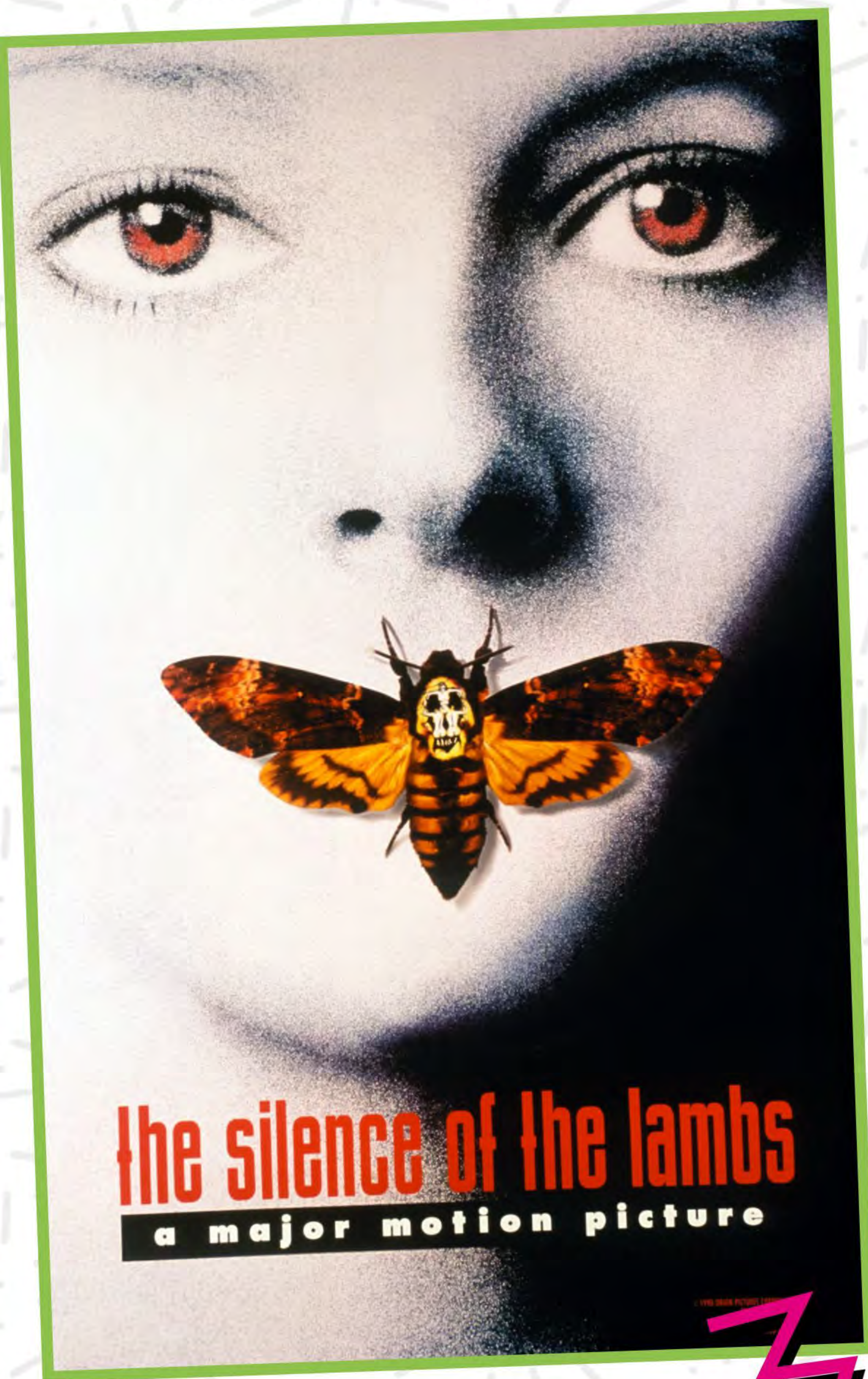
Sleepless in Seattle

1993

22

This romantic comedy-drama by Nora Ephron was a surprise hit at the cinema, and further cemented Tom Hanks as an increasingly bankable actor. It also marks the second of three times he would team up with his co-star, Meg Ryan. The first was *Joy Verses the Volcano*; the third being *You've Got Mail*, also by Ephron.

"Anthony Hopkins won an Oscar for his sinister portrayal of Hannibal Lecter, while Jodie Foster picked up her second best actress Oscar"



The Silence of the Lambs

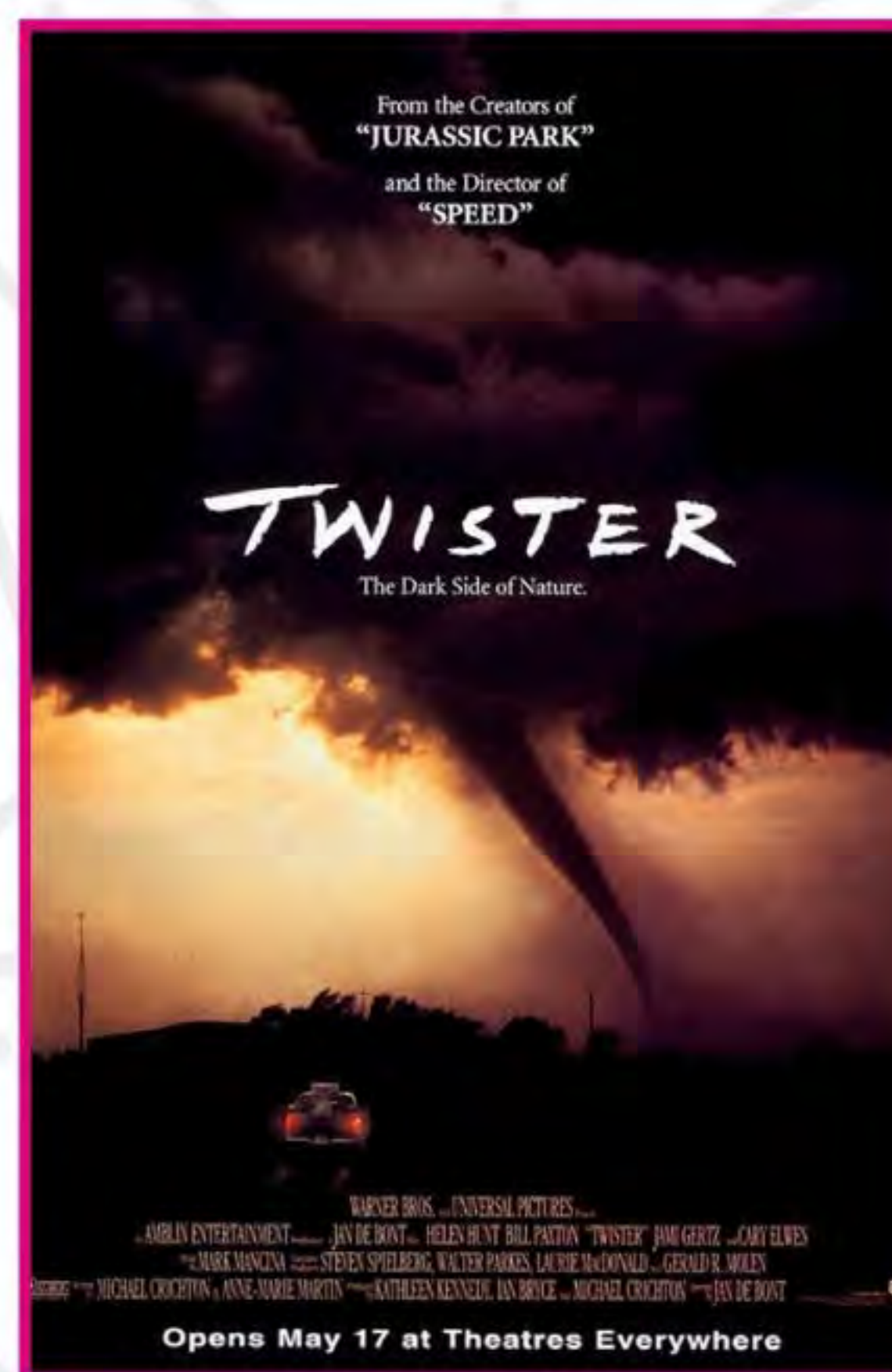
1991

23 Anthony Hopkins won an Oscar for his sinister portrayal of Hannibal Lecter. It was Oscars all round in fact, with the chilling psychological drama also winning Jodie Foster her second best actress Oscar, the best picture, and a best director gong for Jonathan Demme. Audiences agreed, and it grossed \$272 million at the box office.

Twister

1996

24 Jan de Bont's tale of idiot storm chasers makes for rather spectacular viewing, and features a somewhat surprising lead performance from the late Bill Paxton. Although it lost out on a best visual effects Oscar to *Independence Day*, it did win a Golden Raspberry Award for the worst written film grossing over \$100 million. Ouch!



Jerry Maguire

1996

26 Notable for introducing the public to Renée Zellweger, Jerry Maguire works thanks to a fantastic performance from Tom Cruise as the titular character, and Cuba Gooding Jr, who won an Oscar for his portrayal of Maguire's remaining sole client, Rodney 'Rod' Tidwell. Audiences showed him the money, and Cameron Crowe's film netted more than \$270 million worldwide.



The Lion King

1994

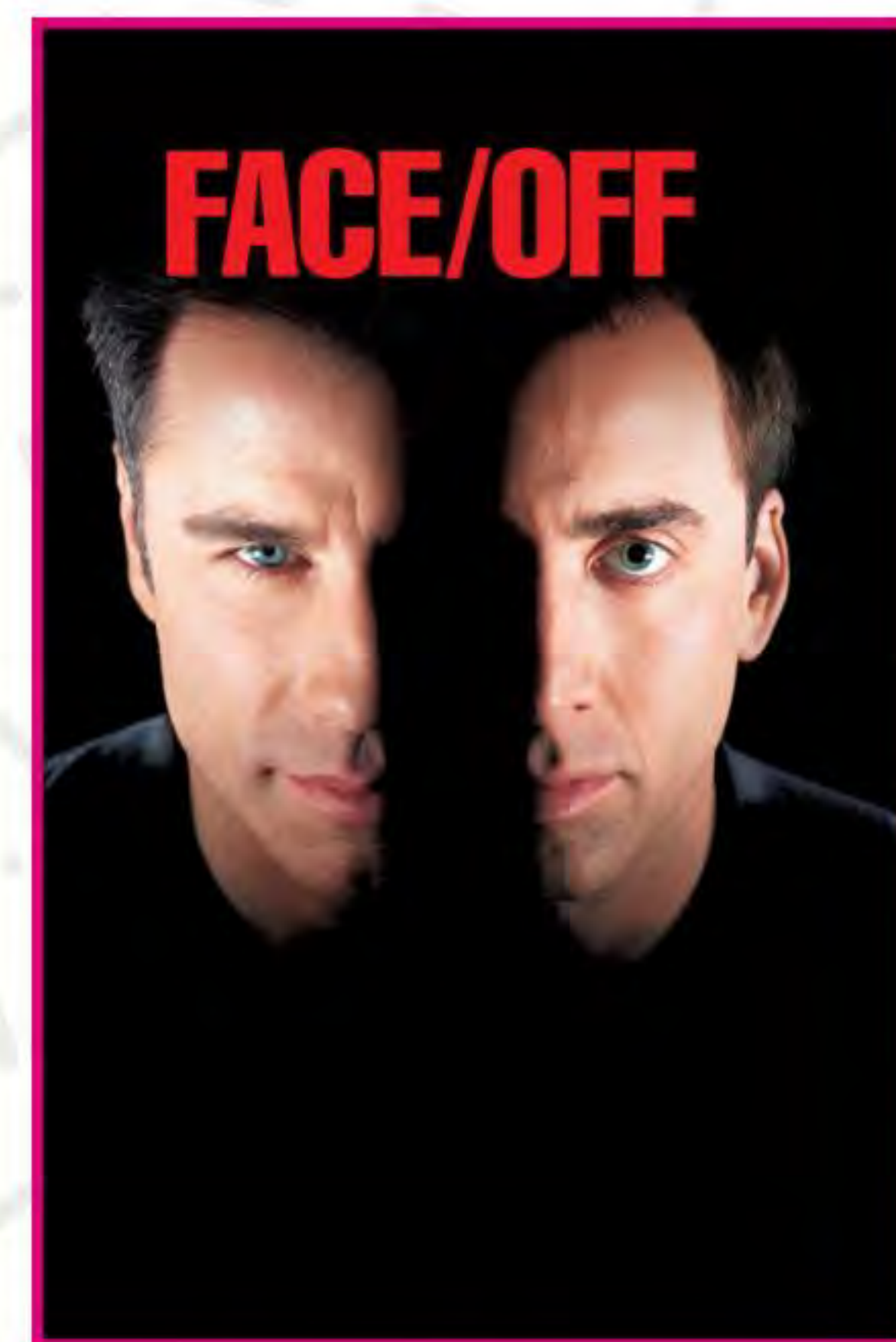
25 Loosely based on *Hamlet*, this was another box-office success for Disney, and featured the vocal talents of Matthew Broderick, James Earl Jones, Jeremy Irons, Rowan Atkinson and many others. Elevated by an excellent soundtrack from Sir Elton John, even a string of terrible sequels can't tarnish its incredible reputation and stunning animation.



Face/Off

1997

27 Arguably the nuttiest plot of the '90s, *Face/Off* features John Travolta's Sean Archer swapping faces with Nicholas Cage's Caster Troy so that he can find a bomb that is supposedly going to level Los Angeles. John Woo's film shouldn't work on any level whatsoever, but it does thanks to tight action sequences and the magnificent one-upmanship of its two leads.



Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

1990

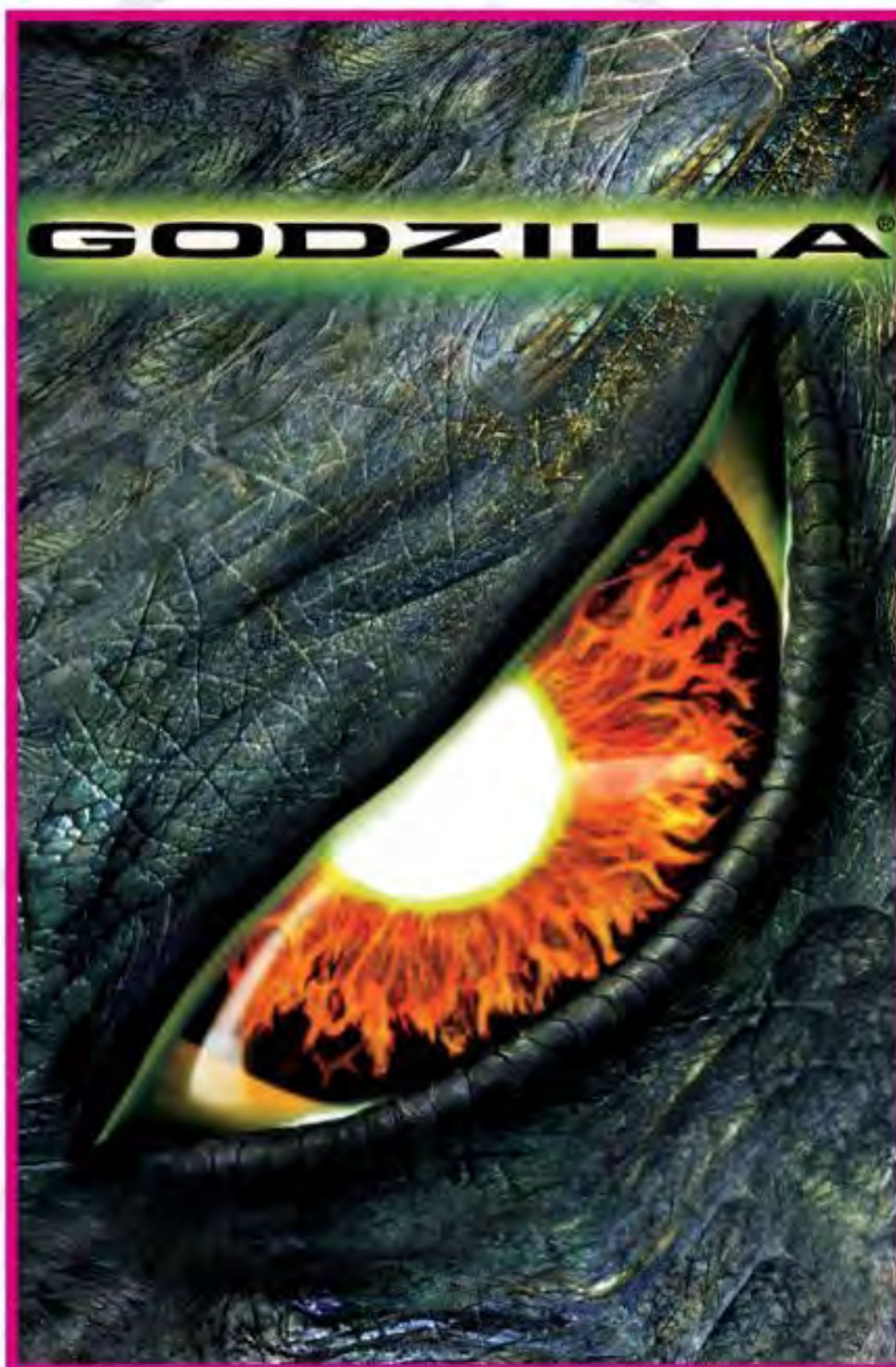
28 If you are a child of the '90s, chances are you begged and pleaded with your parents to take you to see this on the big screen. Based on the popular '80s comic and fuelled by Partners In Kryme's top-ten single, *Turtle Power*, *TMNT* became the ninth highest-grossing film of the year, and led to two sequels in 1991 and 1993.



Godzilla

1998

29 *Godzilla* must have made perfect sense at the time. Spielberg had proven that dinosaurs were popular, and *Godzilla* was even bigger. Clearly a movie would be amazing. Alas, it wasn't, and while it admittedly has some decent special effects, it is a mess of a film thanks to Matthew Broderick's unconvincing lead and a bored Jean Reno.



▲ Titanic

1997

30 James Cameron's fascination with shipwrecks led to the biggest-grossing film of all time (well, at least until his own *Avatar* surpassed it in 2009). It might not be super accurate, but *Titanic* does feature astonishing special effects, great turns from Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet, and *that* bloody song by Canadian warbler Celine Dion.

Blade

1998

31 Is there any superhero movie that has a better opening scene than *Blade's* bloody rave club? Wesley Snipes is effortlessly cool as the eponymous vampire hunter, and made a big enough impact that two further sequels followed in 2002 and 2004. Not bad for a low-tier Marvel character from the early '70s. The original film was a huge commercial success.



LA Confidential

1997

32 Curtis Hanson's scintillating adaptation of James Ellroy's classic crime thriller launched the Hollywood careers of Russell Crowe and Guy Pearce, earned a best supporting actress Oscar for Kim Basinger, and the best adapted screenplay for Brian Koppelman. A planned TV series featuring Kiefer Sutherland never made it past its pilot.



Groundhog Day

1993

33 Harold Ramis directed fellow *Ghostbuster* Bill Murray in this excellent romantic comedy about an arrogant weatherman who finds himself continually stuck covering Punxsutawney's Groundhog Day. Murray arguably delivers one of his finest performances, but Andie MacDowell is also on fine form as the news reporter who (initially) rebuffs his continued advances.



Scream

1996

34 Horror films failed to make much impact during most of the 1990s, but Wes Craven's *Scream* changed all that. *Scream* was so successful thanks to a very clever script from Kevin Williamson, which continually messes with the audiences' conception of standard horror tropes. Several sequels and a TV series of the same name followed.



Men in Black

1997

35 While everyone likes to focus on all the sci-fi in this film, it can be easy to forget just how funny *Men in Black* actually is. Will Smith effectively channels the Fresh Prince, but it is Tommy Lee Jones who is the surprising heart of Barry Sonnenfeld's film, playing a wicked straight man to Smith's mouthy rookie agent. It also includes one of the catchiest songs of the '90s.



The Addams Family

1991

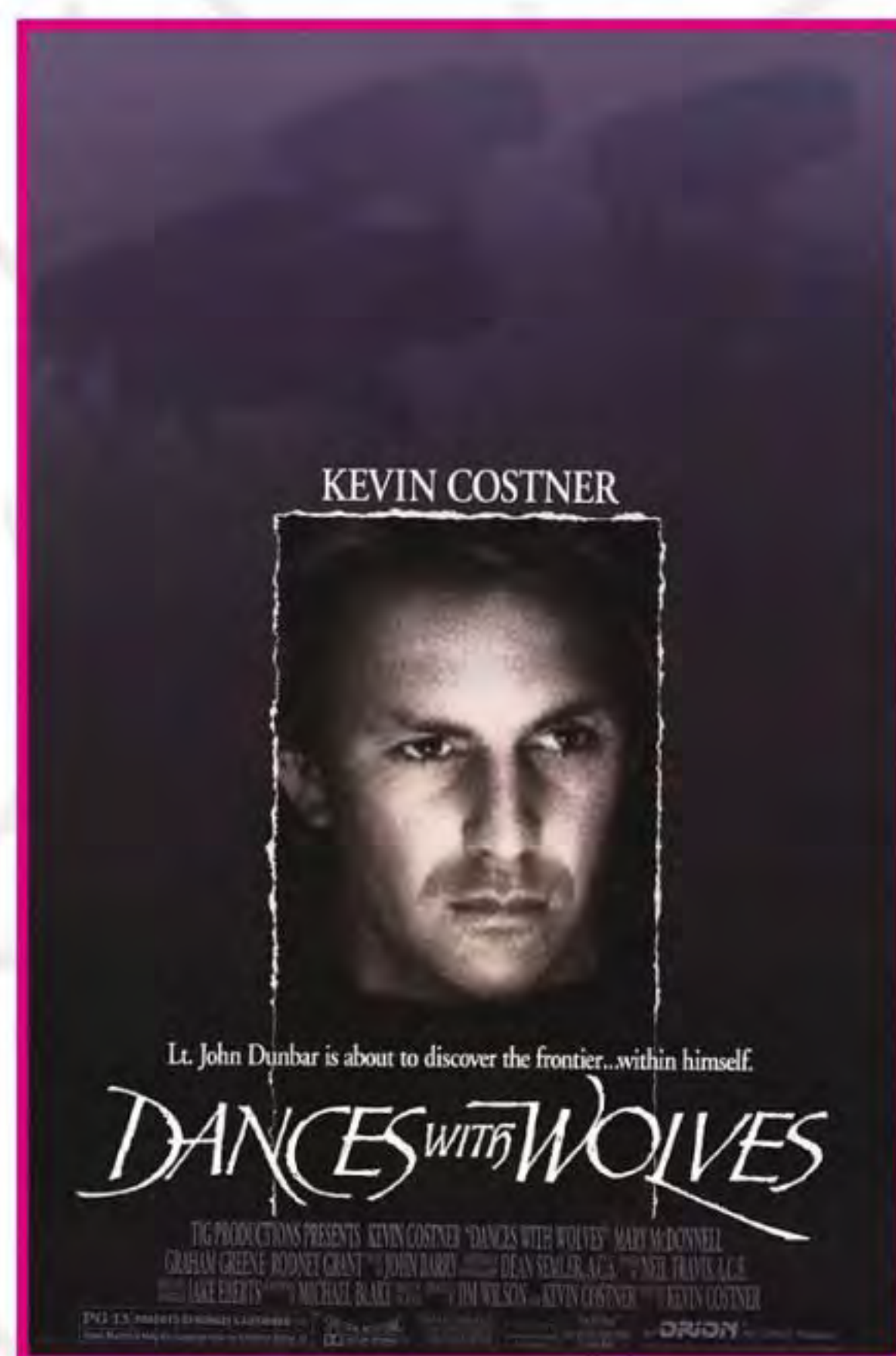
37 Inspired casting is just one of the reasons Barry Sonnenfeld's movie became such a monster at the box office. While Anjelica Huston, Raúl Juliá and Christina Ricci are all on-point as Morticia, Gomez and Wednesday, it's an unrecognisable Christopher Lloyd who steals the show as Uncle Fester. A sequel, *Addams Family Values*, followed in 1993.



Dances with Wolves

1990

36 After headlining numerous films in the late '80s, Kevin Costner's directorial debut not only cemented his status as a leading man for most of the remaining decade, but also scored big at the Oscars, winning seven awards, including best picture. It's now cited as reigniting Hollywood's interest in Westerns.



Total Recall

1990

38 Astonishingly, Arnold Schwarzenegger starred in two of the highest-grossing top-ten films in 1990, however, we are ultimately picking *Total Recall* over *Kindergarten Cop* to go in our selection. The film was adapted from the Philip K Dick short story *We Can Remember It for You Wholesale*, and directed by Paul Verhoeven. It is a magnificent slice of sci-fi-tinged ultraviolence.



Alicia Silverstone

Clueless



Clueless

1995

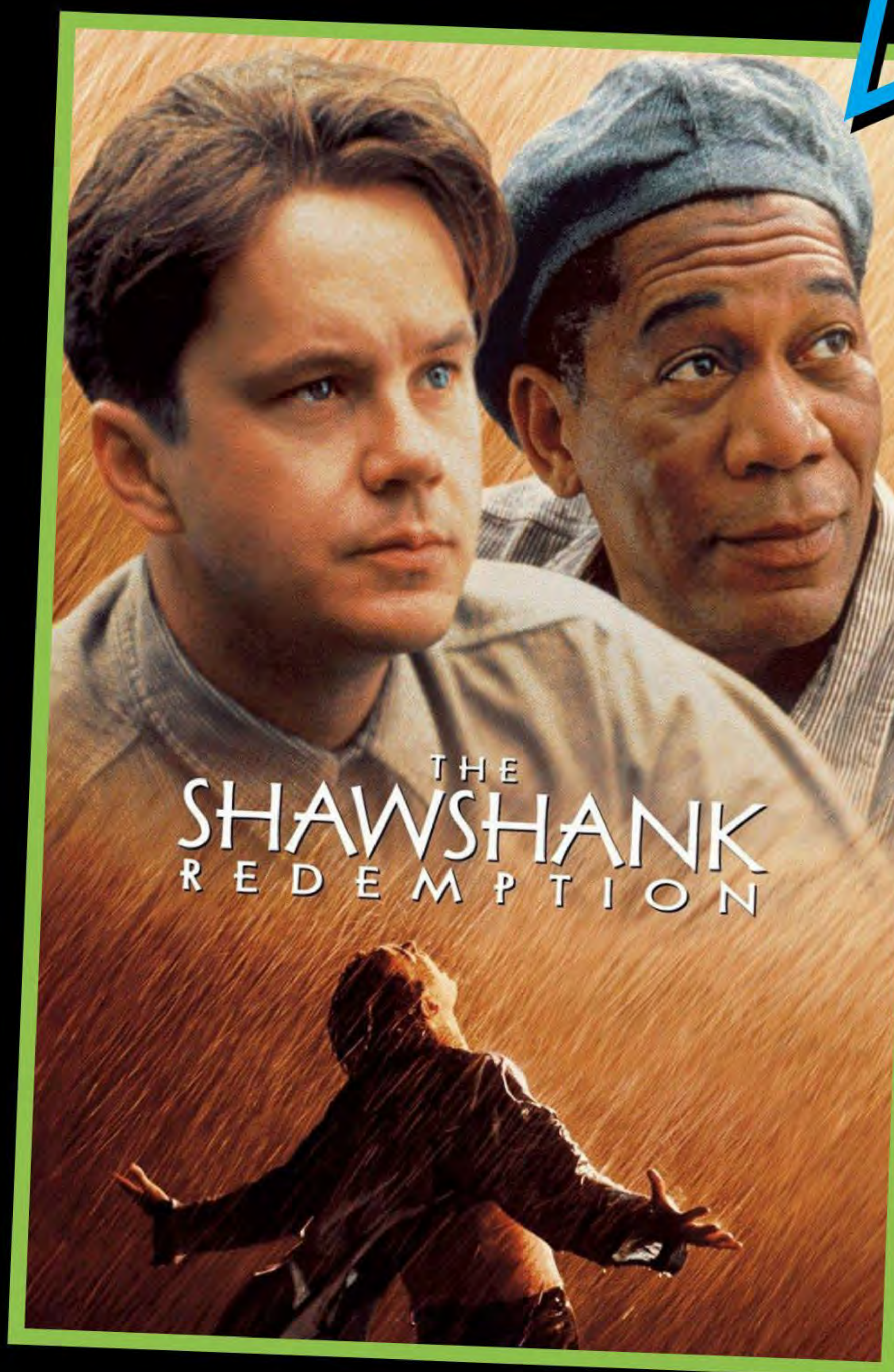
39 Alicia Silverstone shines as the superficial rich girl who eventually realises she's a lot more clueless than she actually thought she was. Loosely based on Jane Austen's *Emma*, *Clueless* works thanks to its young actors firing on all cylinders and a surprisingly excellent soundtrack. A TV series not starring Silverstone appeared in 1996 and ran for three years.

"Arnie had two of the highest-grossing top-ten films in 1990, however, we're picking Total Recall over Kindergarten Cop"

Toy Story

1995

40 Pixar's first movie was a smash success, topping the box office by making more than \$373 million, and highlighting what was possible from a computer-animated film. While the story largely riffs off Jim Henson's *The Christmas Toy*, we still love it due to the constant banter between Tom Hanks' Sheriff Woody and Tim Allen's Buzz Lightyear.



The Shawshank Redemption

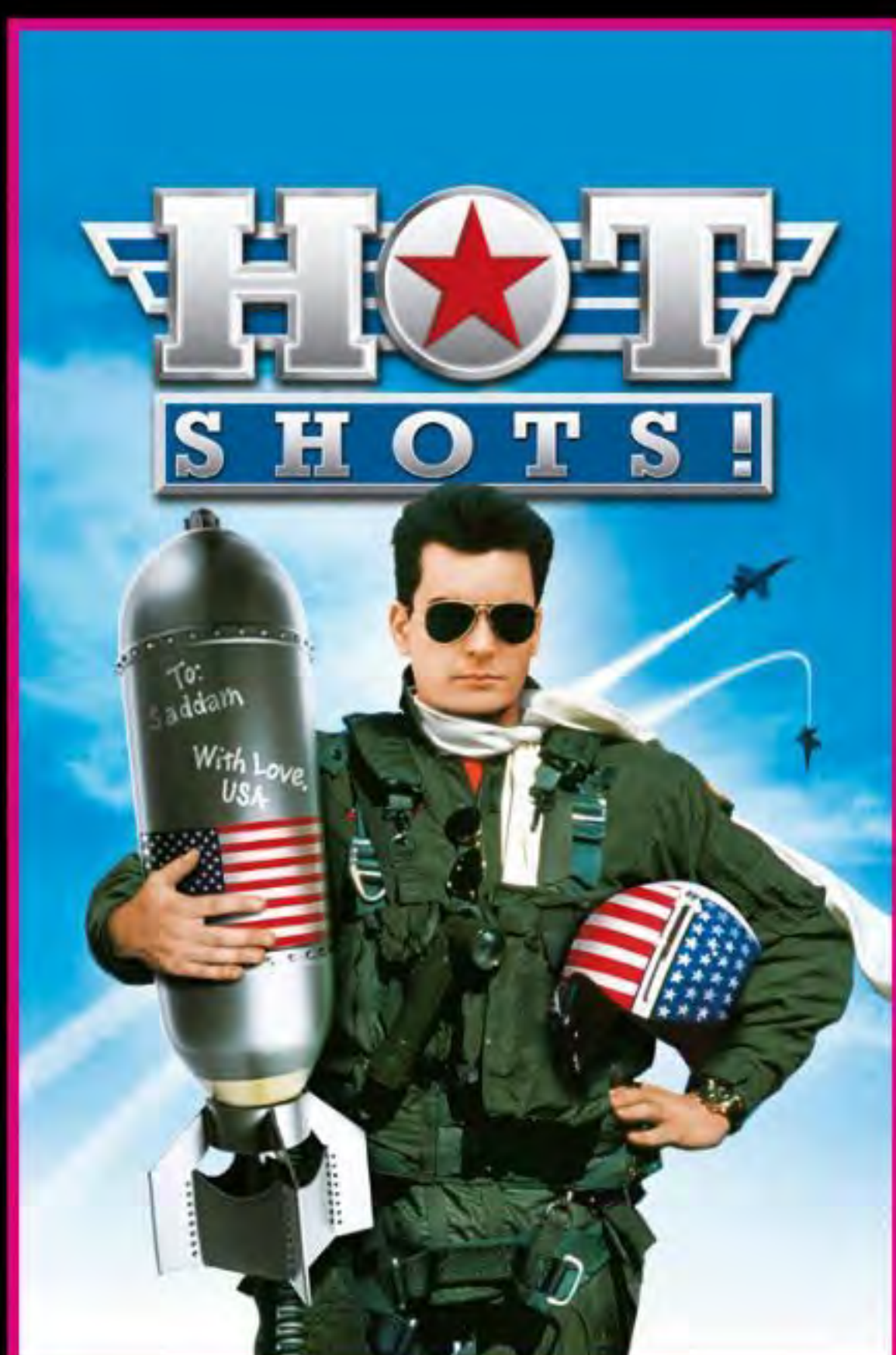
1994

41 Despite critical acclaim, Frank Darabont's adaptation of Stephen King's short story failed to do big numbers at the box office. Word of mouth spread, though, and it's gone on to become one of the most celebrated films of its generation, largely thanks to the on-screen chemistry of Tim Robbins and Morgan Freeman.

Hot Shots!

1991

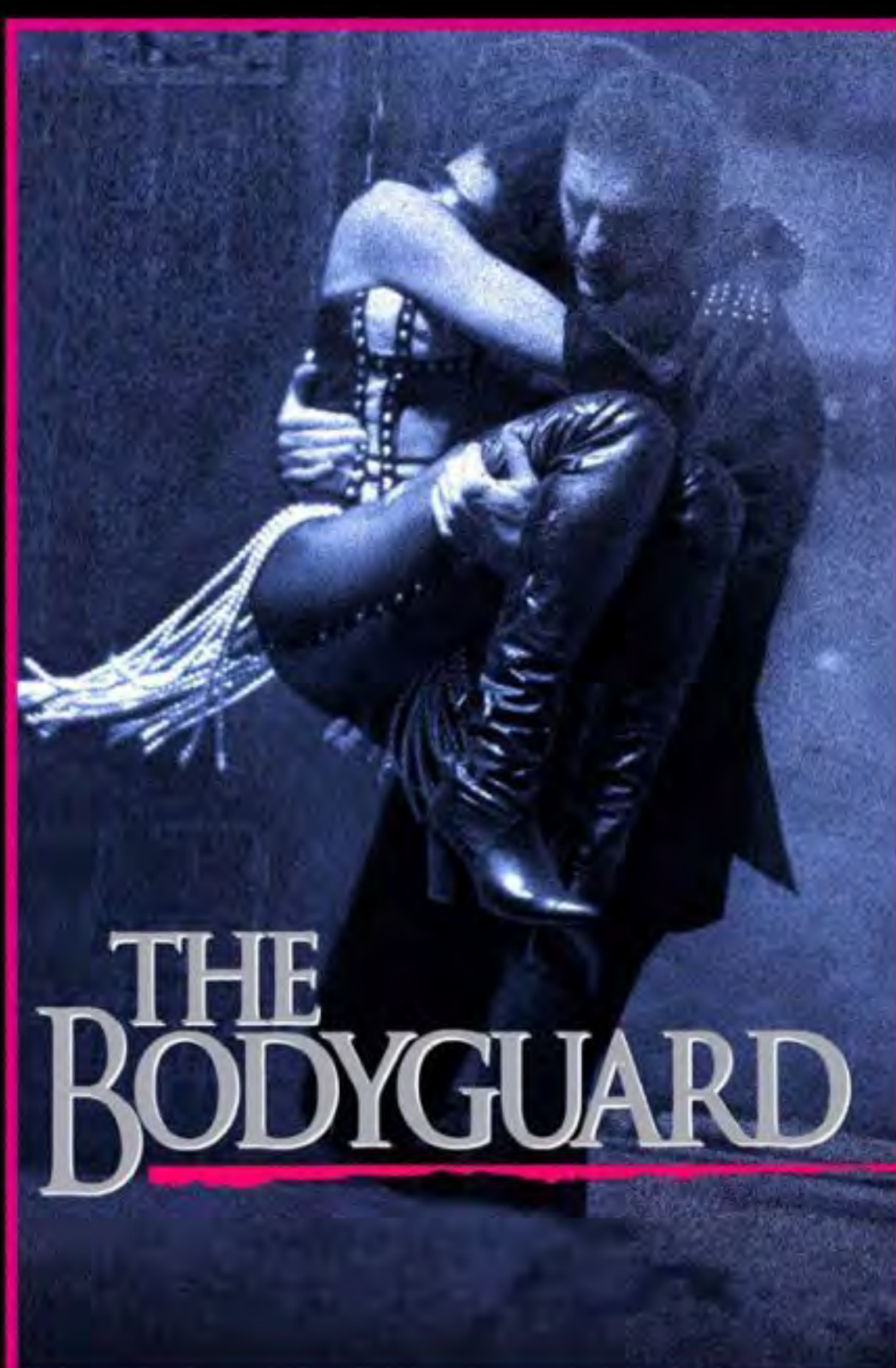
42 Made for just \$26 million, the *Airplane!* team of Zucker, Abrahams and Zucker set their sights on spoofing *Top Gun* and countless other movies, earning \$181 million in the process. Charlie Sheen proves surprisingly comedic, and stars alongside his future *Two and a Half Men* co-star, Jon Cryer. A sequel did equally well in 1993.



The Bodyguard

1992

43 Originally written in the '70s, *The Bodyguard* became another colossal hit for Kevin Costner, and proved that the late Whitney Houston could act as well as sing. Its soundtrack, which features Houston's cover of Dolly Parton's *I Will Always Love You* remains the bestselling soundtrack of all time, with 28.4 million copies sold.



Armageddon

1998

44 Two asteroid movies tussled for dominance in 1998. While *Deep Impact* starred Elijah Wood and Téa Leoni, Michael Bay's preposterous blockbuster featured a team of deep-sea oil drillers led by Bruce Willis. Audiences fell for it hook, line and sinker, allowing the farcical film to make more than \$550 million at the box office.



True Romance

1993

45 Tony Scott's romantic crime caper was written by Quentin Tarantino, and has a script that still sizzles today. Patricia Arquette and Christian Slater have never been better, while they're surrounded by an incredible ensemble cast, including Dennis Hopper, Christopher Walken, Brad Pitt, and Gary Oldman as the pimp, Drexel.



Mission: Impossible

1996

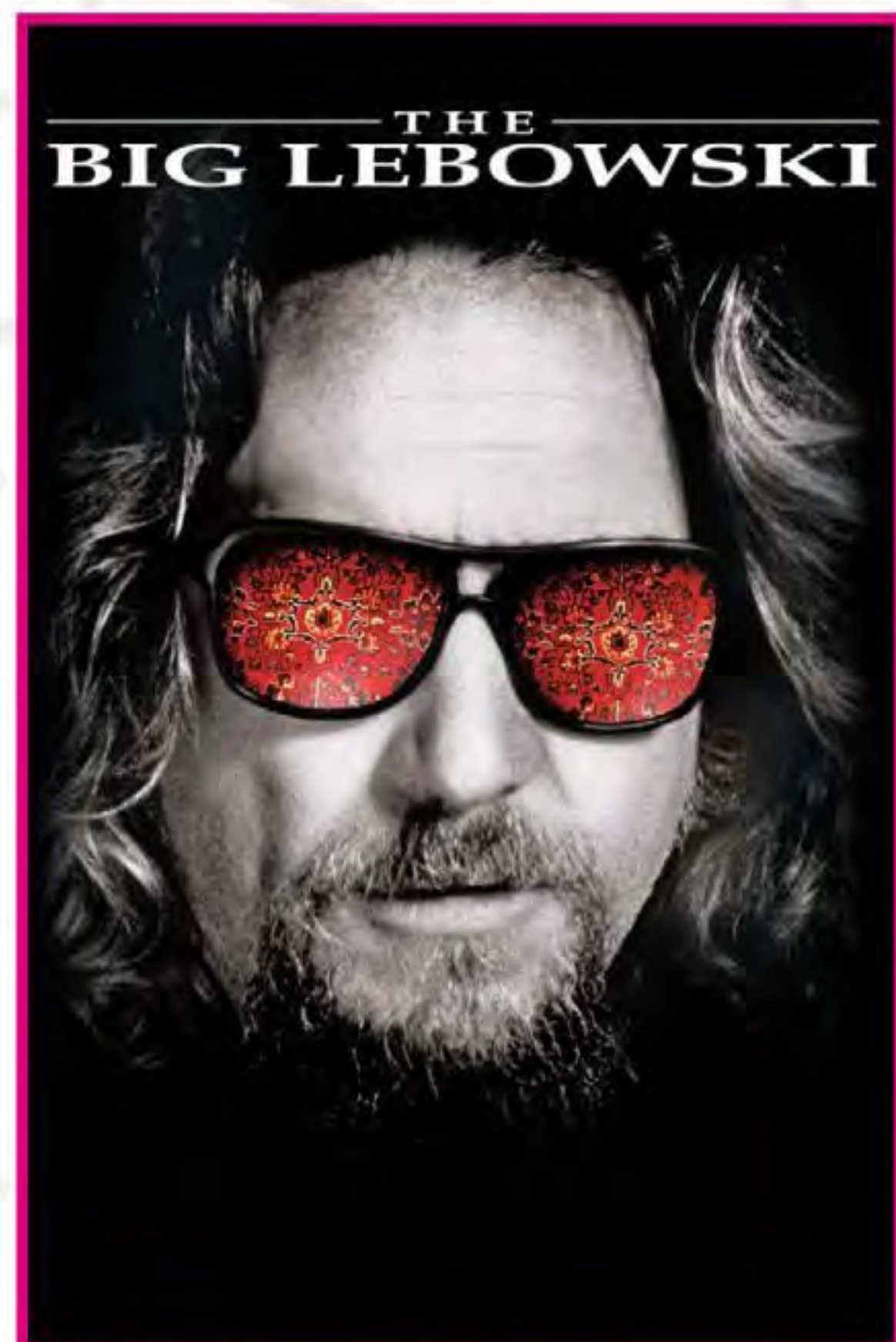
46 Brian De Palma's reboot of the classic television series of the '60s and '70s spawned five sequels and became the third highest-grossing film of the year. Tom Cruise is superb as Ethan Hunt, doing all of his own stunts and surrounding himself with an excellent supporting cast that includes Jean Reno, Ving Rhames and Jon Voight.



The Big Lebowski

1998

49 Although it received a rather mixed reception upon its release, history has taught us that *The Big Lebowski* is in fact amazing. Filled with unconventional dialogue, a strong ensemble cast and a hopelessly complex plot, the Coen brothers' film is held together masterfully by Jeff Bridges as Jeffrey 'The Dude' Lebowski.



Heat

1995

47 Michael Mann's crime thriller drew much expectation on its release, mainly because it was the first time that Robert De Niro and Al Pacino had ever appeared on screen together. It was a big moment. While the much-anticipated scene proved as good as everyone had hoped for, it's undoubtedly the final dramatic gunfight that lingers in the memory the most.



Toy Story 2

1999

50 Although it also suffered from a rather troubled production, *Toy Story 2* managed to outperform the excellent original, both at the box office and as a movie in itself. It's filled with tremendous gags, has an interesting story at its core, and has markedly improved effects. And to think it was originally planned to be a direct-to-video release...



Saving Private Ryan

1998

48 Its famous opening scene has been outdone many times since, but Ryan's assault on Omaha Beach was a shocking revelation at the time, apparently moving real war veterans to tears because of its authenticity. It made more than \$481 million at the box office, and earned Steven Spielberg his second best director Oscar.



FROM JOHN HUGHES HOME ALONE

A FAMILY COMEDY WITHOUT THE FAMILY



Home Alone ▲

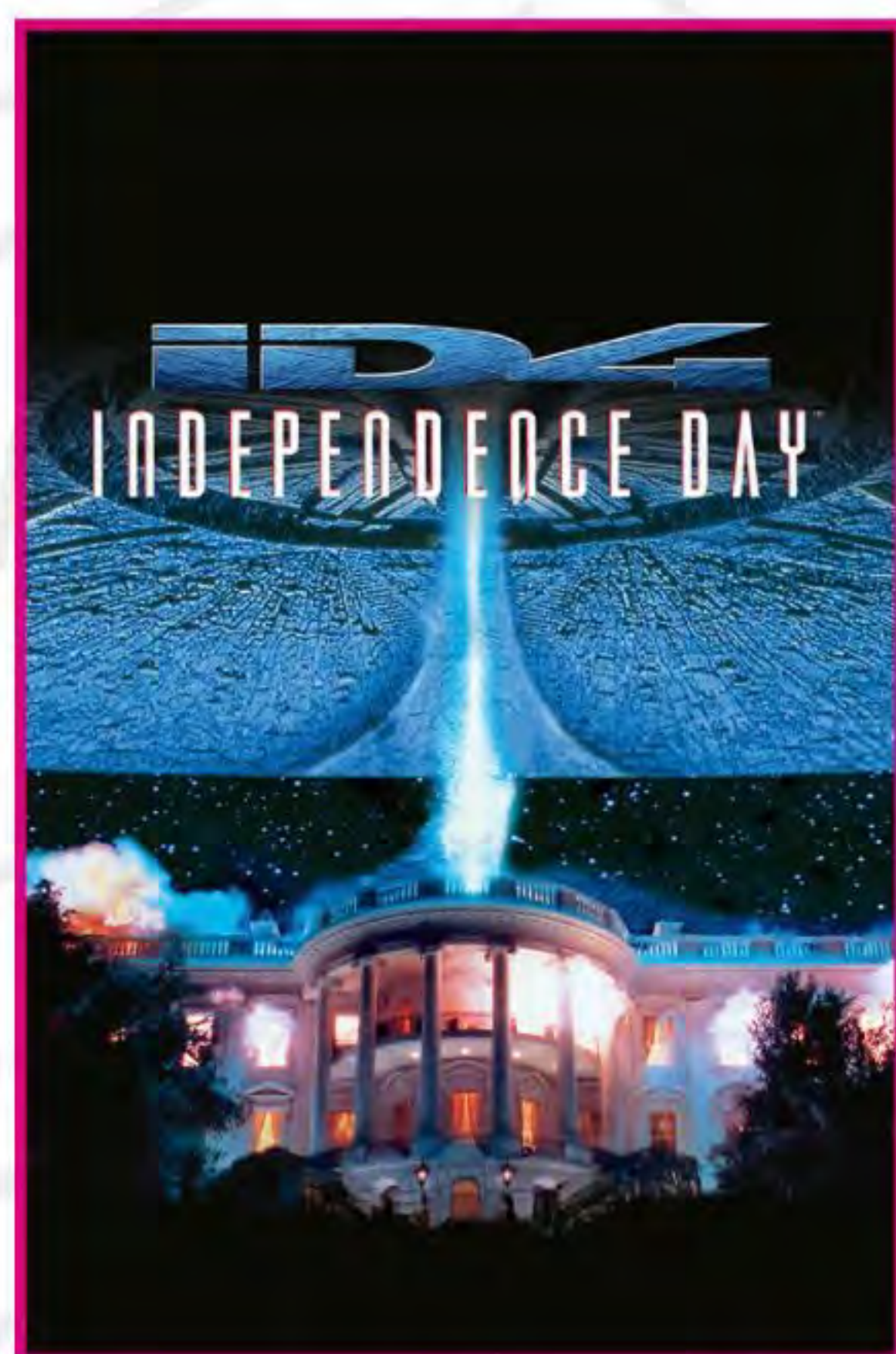
1990

51 Made for just \$18 million, *Home Alone* took more than \$476 at the box office, turning its young lead, Macaulay Culkin, into one of the decade's biggest stars. The riotous comedy may not be very believable, but it's constantly entertaining, and led to three additional movies (although Culkin only returned for the sequel).

Independence Day

1996

52 Will Smith punching out an alien with the punchline “welcome to Earth” is just as good as watching the White House blow up. Roland Emmerich’s CGI-fuelled sci-fi romp is great fun thanks to insane special effects and fun performances from Smith, Jeff Goldblum and Randy Quaid. Just don’t mention the god-awful sequel.



The Frighteners

1996

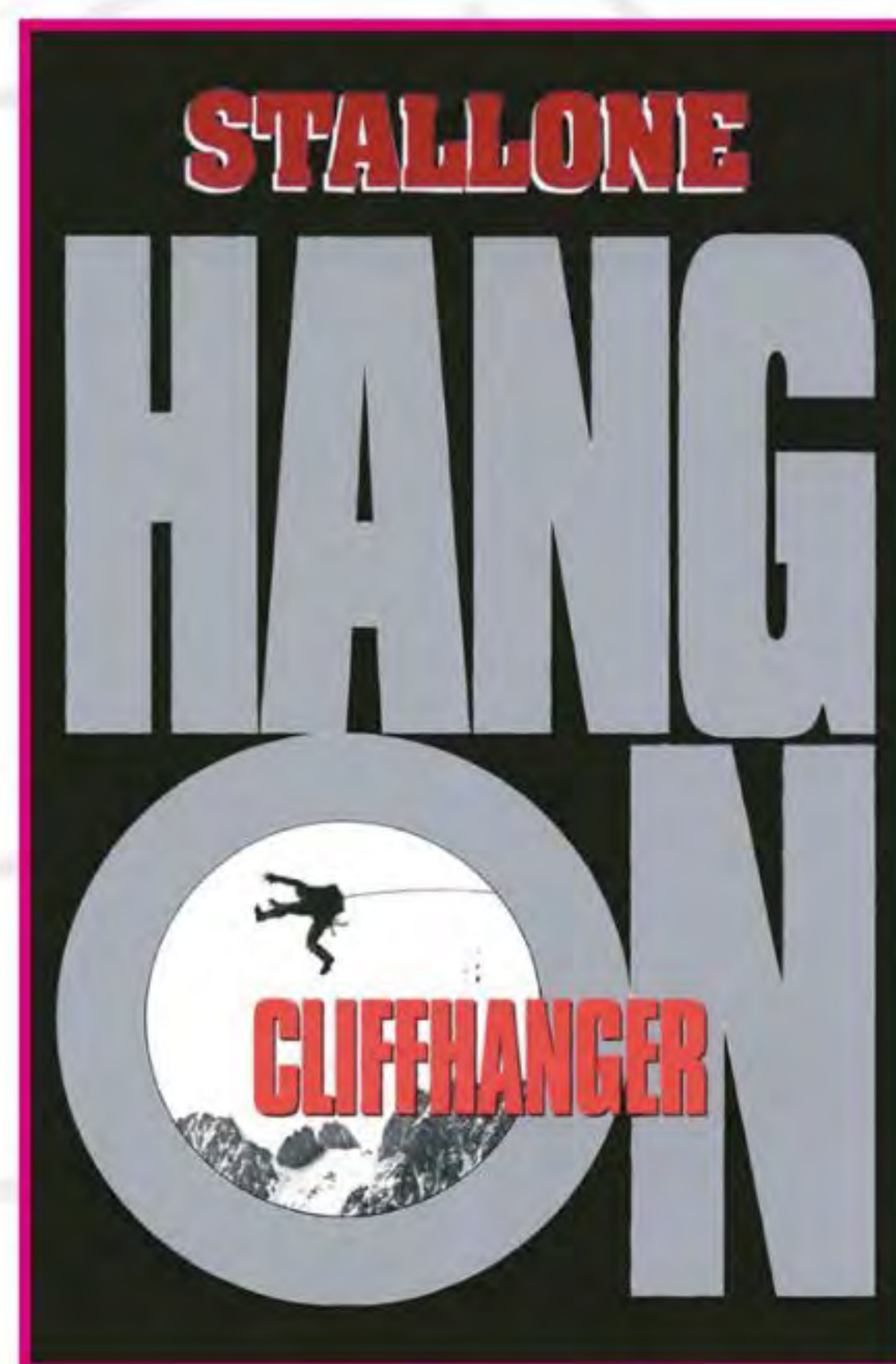
53 Michael J Fox is undeniably wonderful as the fraud exorcist who sends his ghostly mates into people’s houses so that he can charge exorbitant fees in order to exorcise them. Peter Jackson’s horror comedy can still be enjoyed today thanks to great special effects and a rather creepy performance from Jeffrey Combs as an eccentric FBI agent.



Cliffhanger

1993

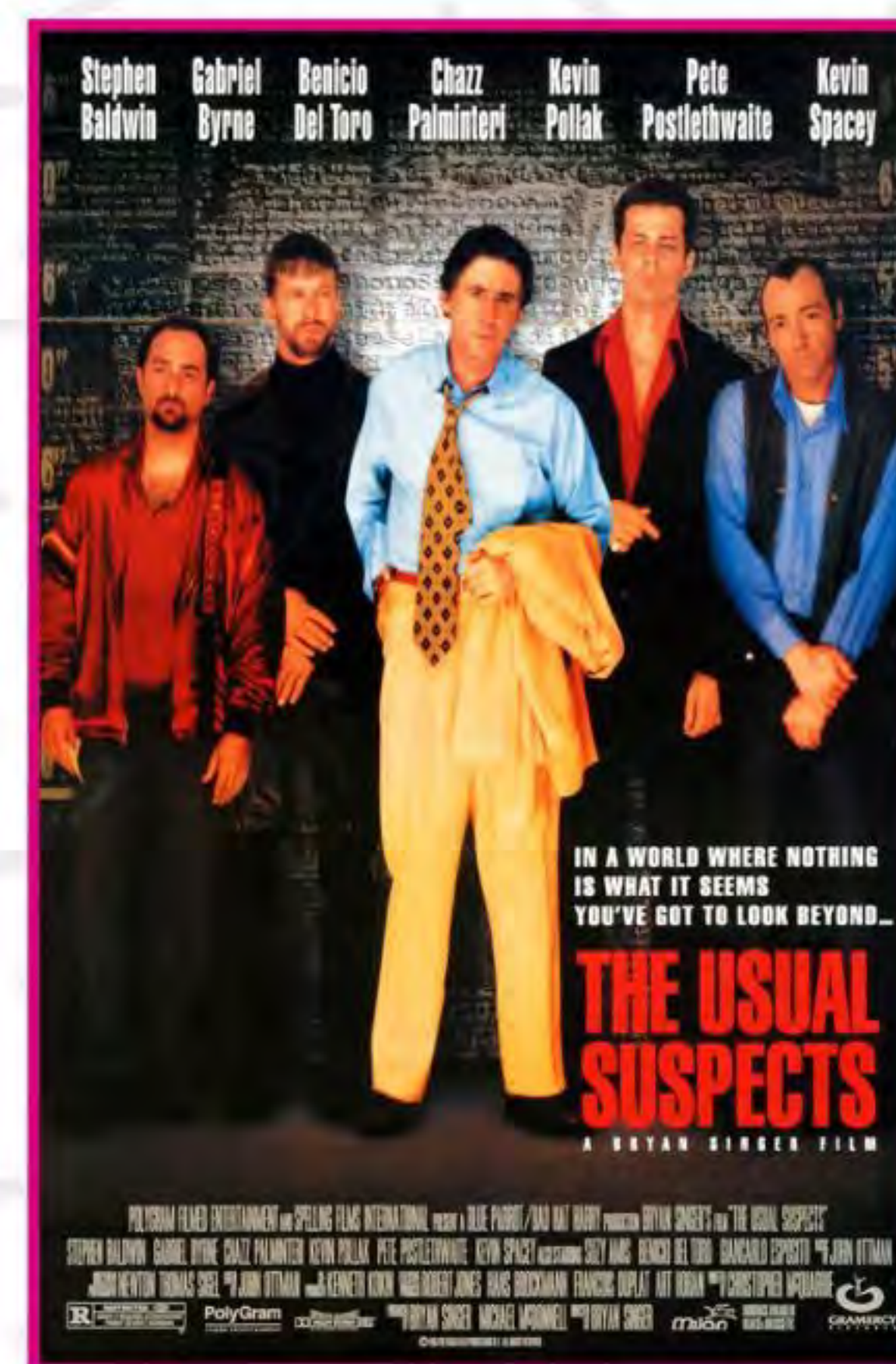
54 Sylvester Stallone’s box-office clout faded somewhat during the ‘90s, but *Cliffhanger* proved that he was still brutally efficient at killing bad guys, particularly ones with English accents. The actual mountaineering isn’t very authentic at all, and the dialogue is laughable, but no one punches like Stallone does, and he gets to do it in *Cliffhanger*. A lot!



The Usual Suspects

1995

55 Christopher McQuarrie’s deliciously twisting tale of deceit won him an Academy Award, and proved an effective calling card for director Bryan Singer. Made for just \$6 million, it features an excellent ensemble cast that includes Gabriel Byrne, and led to one of the most mysterious on-screen villains of all time, Keyser Söze.



The Matrix

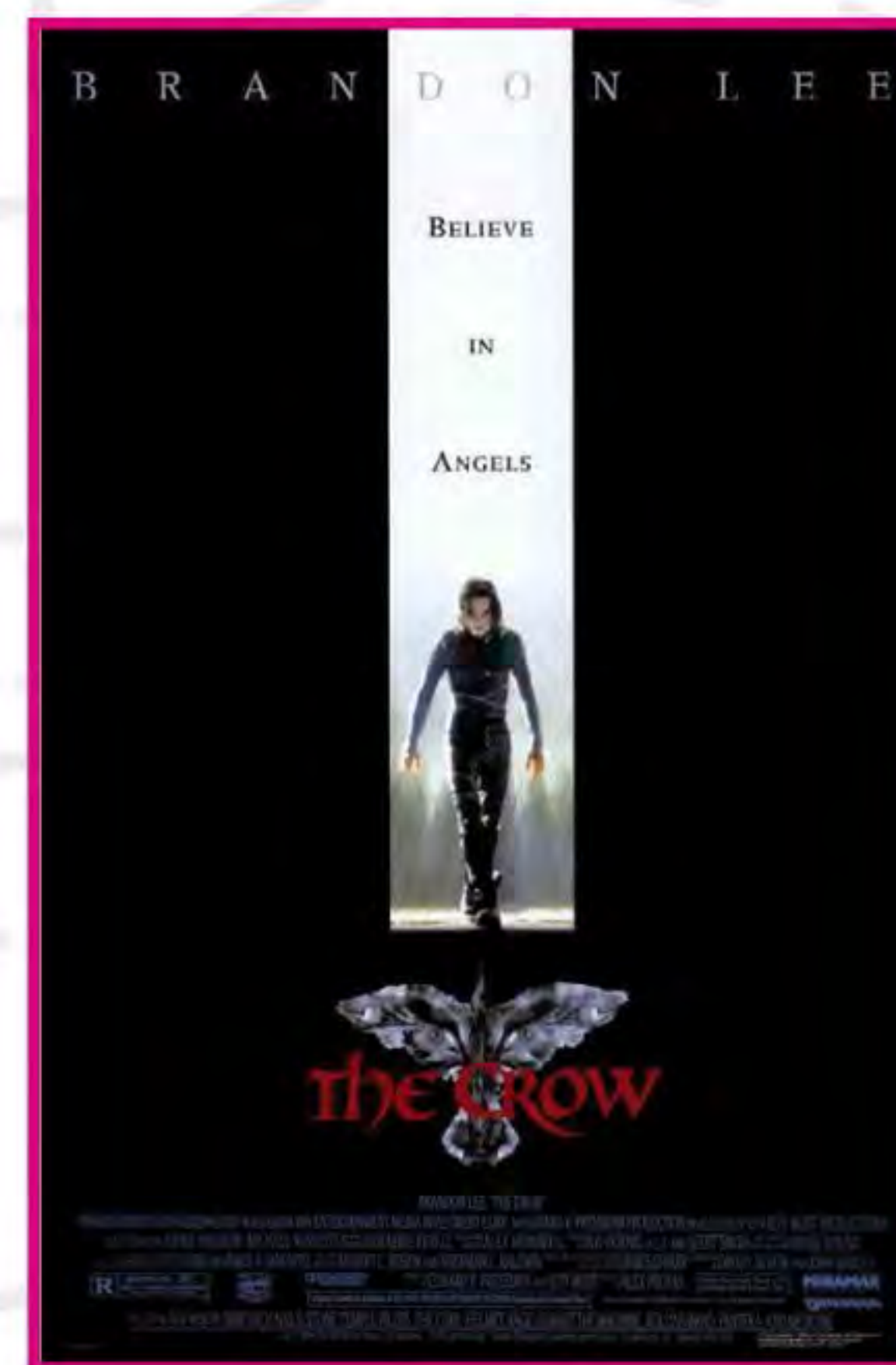
1999

56 The Wachowski brothers took their love of sci-fi and anime and effectively reinvented action movies thanks to incredible wire-fu combat scenes and the use of ‘bullet time’, which allowed Keanu Reeves and the rest of the cast to perform incredible superhuman moves. Just ignore the incredibly bad sequels that followed.

The Crow

1994

57 As enjoyable as Alex Proyas’ dark fantasy is, it is somewhat overshadowed by the tragic death of its lead, Brandon Lee. The only son of Bruce Lee had been killed by an accidental gunshot wound on 31 March the previous year, while filming a pivotal scene in the movie. The scene was remade using computer graphics. Numerous sequels (naturally with new leads) followed.



Beauty and the Beast

1991

58 The third film of Disney's 'renaissance period' generated more than \$425 million at the box office, finishing in third place behind *Terminator 2* and *Robin Hood*. Originally planned in the '30s and '50s, it finally powered through production under the guidance of Michael Eisner. It was the second Disney film to use computer-generated imagery.



Reservoir Dogs

1992

59 Quentin Tarantino's directorial debut was a massive hit at the Sundance Film Festival. The movie itself remains superb thanks to some exceptional performances from the likes of Steve Buscemi, Tim Roth and Harvey Keitel, as well as Michael Madsen's gruesome torture scene/dance to Stealers Wheel's *Stuck in the Middle with You*.



Forrest Gump

1994

60 Tom Hanks' portrayal of the slow-witted Gump earned him his second best actor Oscar, straight after winning it the previous year for *Philadelphia*. Despite being a drama, there are lots of clever CGI effects happening in the film, which director Robert Zemeckis used to integrate Hanks into numerous key scenes of American history.

Tom Hanks is Forrest Gump



The Fugitive

1993

61 Harrison Ford is absolutely superb as the doctor who is wrongly convicted of killing his wife, and is pursued by a doggedly efficient US marshal played by Tommy Lee Jones. The set pieces are really excellent and still parodied today, while Jones's performance was so strong that it earned him an Oscar and his own spin-off film, *U.S. Marshals*.



Con Air

1997

62 Simon West's hi-octane blockbuster features one of the best mullets in cinematic history. It also includes a delightfully unhinged performance from John Malkovich as Cyrus 'The Virus' Grissom, who intends to hijack a plane filled with dangerous convicts. Thankfully Nicholas Cage and his outrageous mullet are also on board to stop him.



Bill & Ted's Bogus Journey

1991

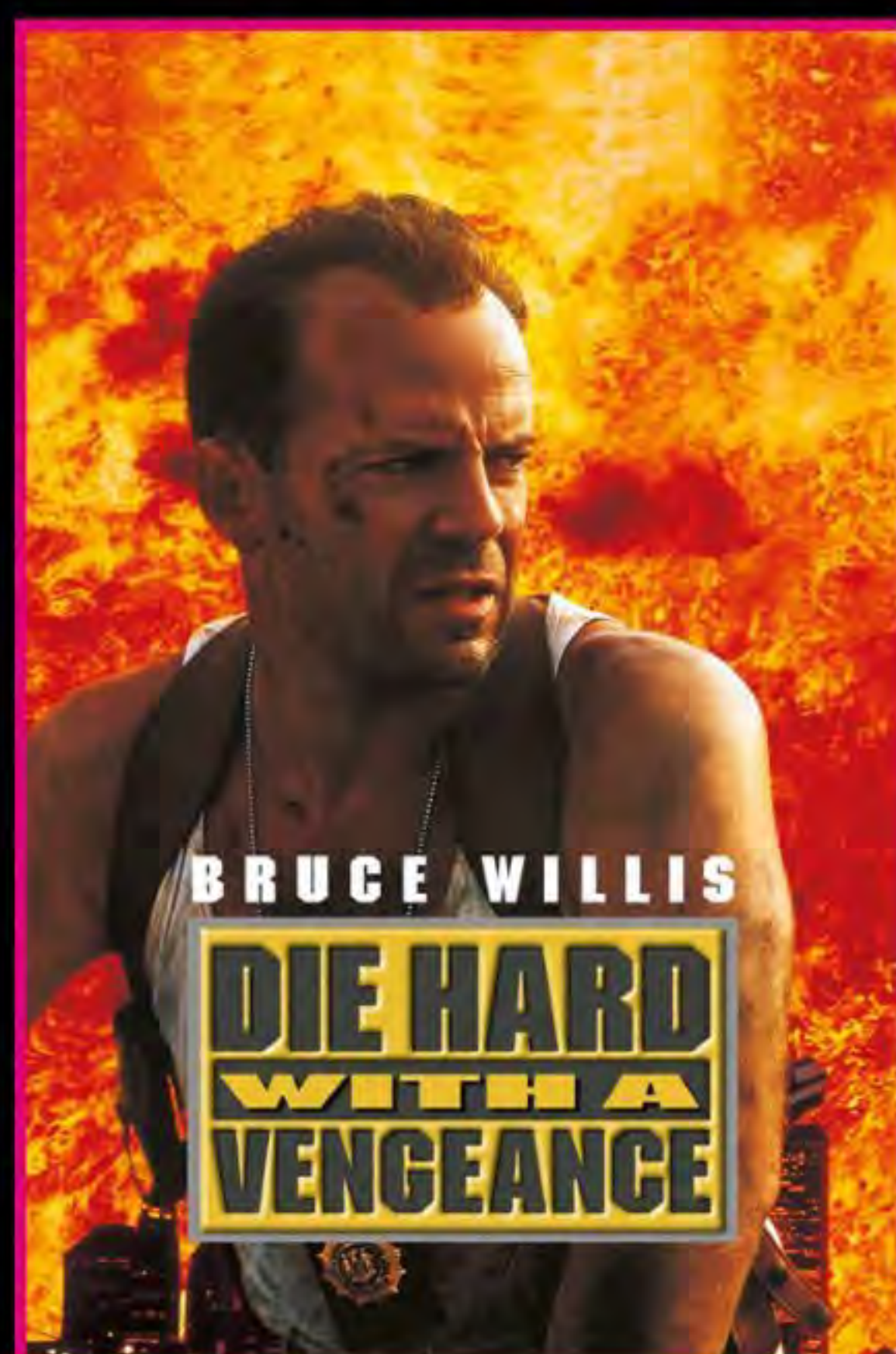
63 The adventures of William 'Bill' S Preston and Ted 'Theodore' Logan continue with this delightfully nutty sequel. Alex Winter and Keanu Reeves excel as the lovable losers destined to unite the world and find time to play chess with Death, meet God and create a world-changing song in the form of Kiss's *God Gave Rock and Roll to You II*.



Die Hard with a Vengeance

1995

64 Yes, we are aware that *Die Hard 2* came out in the '90s, but this is the (slightly) better movie thanks to the bickering interplay of Bruce Willis and Samuel L. Jackson as Zeus Carver. Adapted from a screenplay called *Simon Says*, it also features Jeremy Irons as the brother of Hans Gruber.



Grosse Pointe Blank

1997

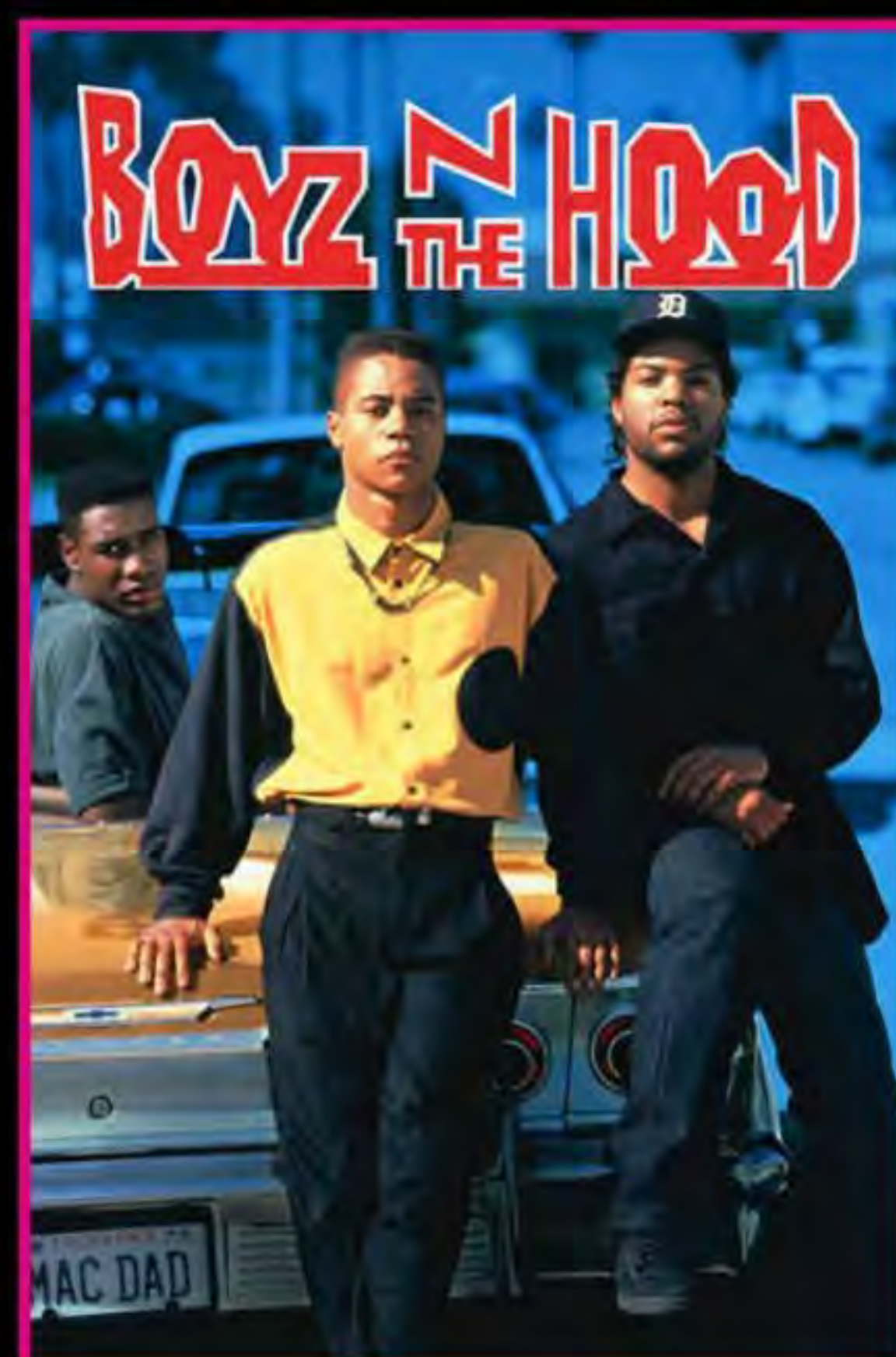
65 You don't get many films about disillusioned hitmen who go to their high-school reunions so they can also attend a convenient hit, which is a shame. George Armitage's deliciously dark comedy works thanks to a great '80s soundtrack and dynamic performances from John Cusack and Dan Aykroyd's rival hitmen.



Boyz n the Hood

1991

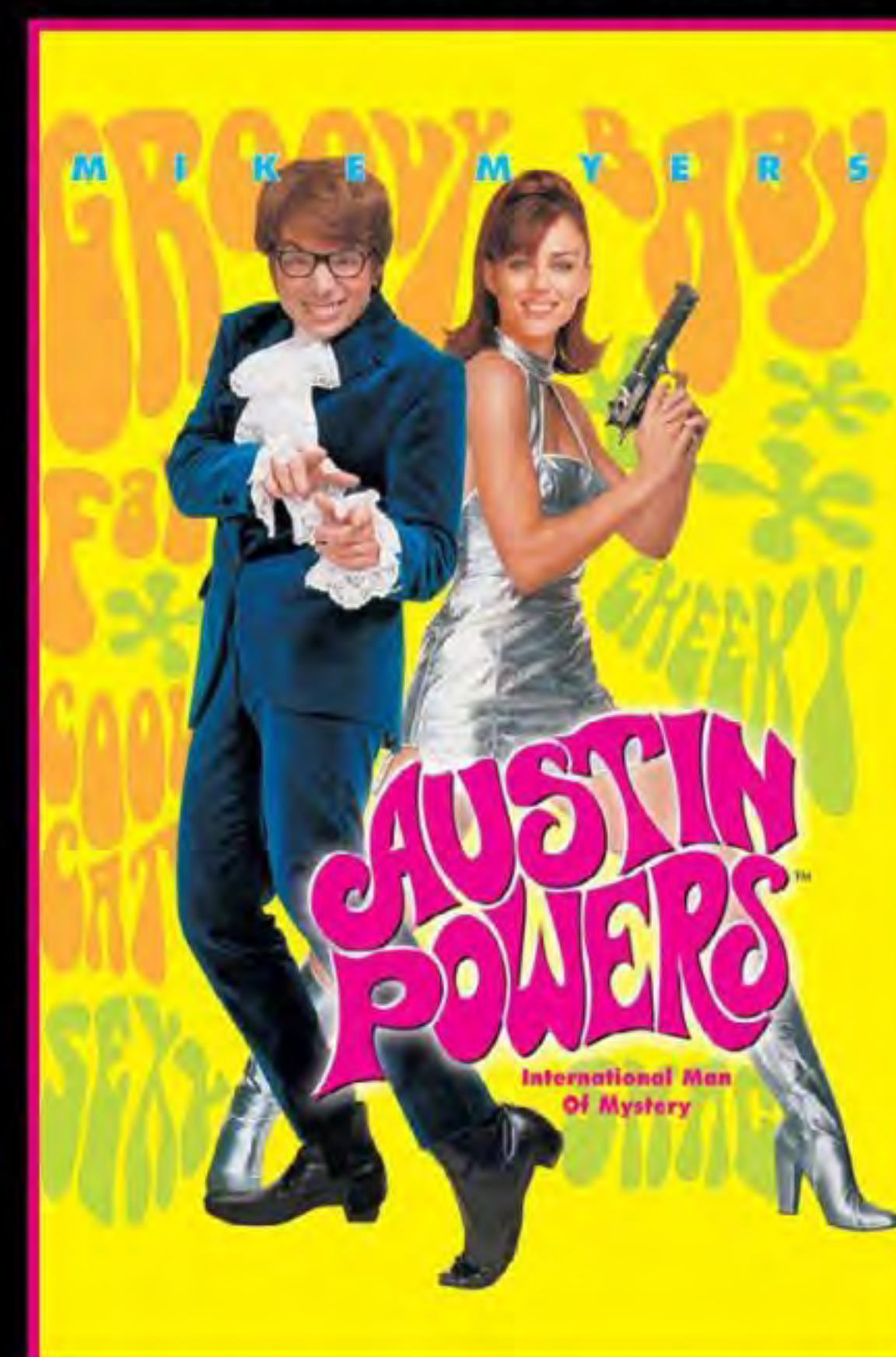
66 John Singleton's nominations for best director and original screenplay meant he became the youngest director and first African American to ever be nominated. While Cuba Gooding Jr. excels as protagonist Tre, it's an astonishing performance from rapper Ice Cube, and an insanely good supporting cast.



Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery

1997

67 Jay Roach's fantastic mockery of *James Bond* features two performances from Mike Myers, one as the titular spy; the other as his adversary, Dr. Evil (who was going to be played by Jim Carrey). It was a surprise success for Newline, which led to a sequel in 1999 and a third movie in 2002.



SCHINDLER'S LIST



Schindler's List

1993

68 Spielberg's moving adaptation of *Schindler's Ark* (which was first released in 1982) wasn't an easy watch, but it did lead to a long-overdue best director Oscar for the acclaimed director. It performed incredibly well at the box office, too, and catapulted Liam Neeson and Ralph Fiennes into the limelight.

Jumanji

1995

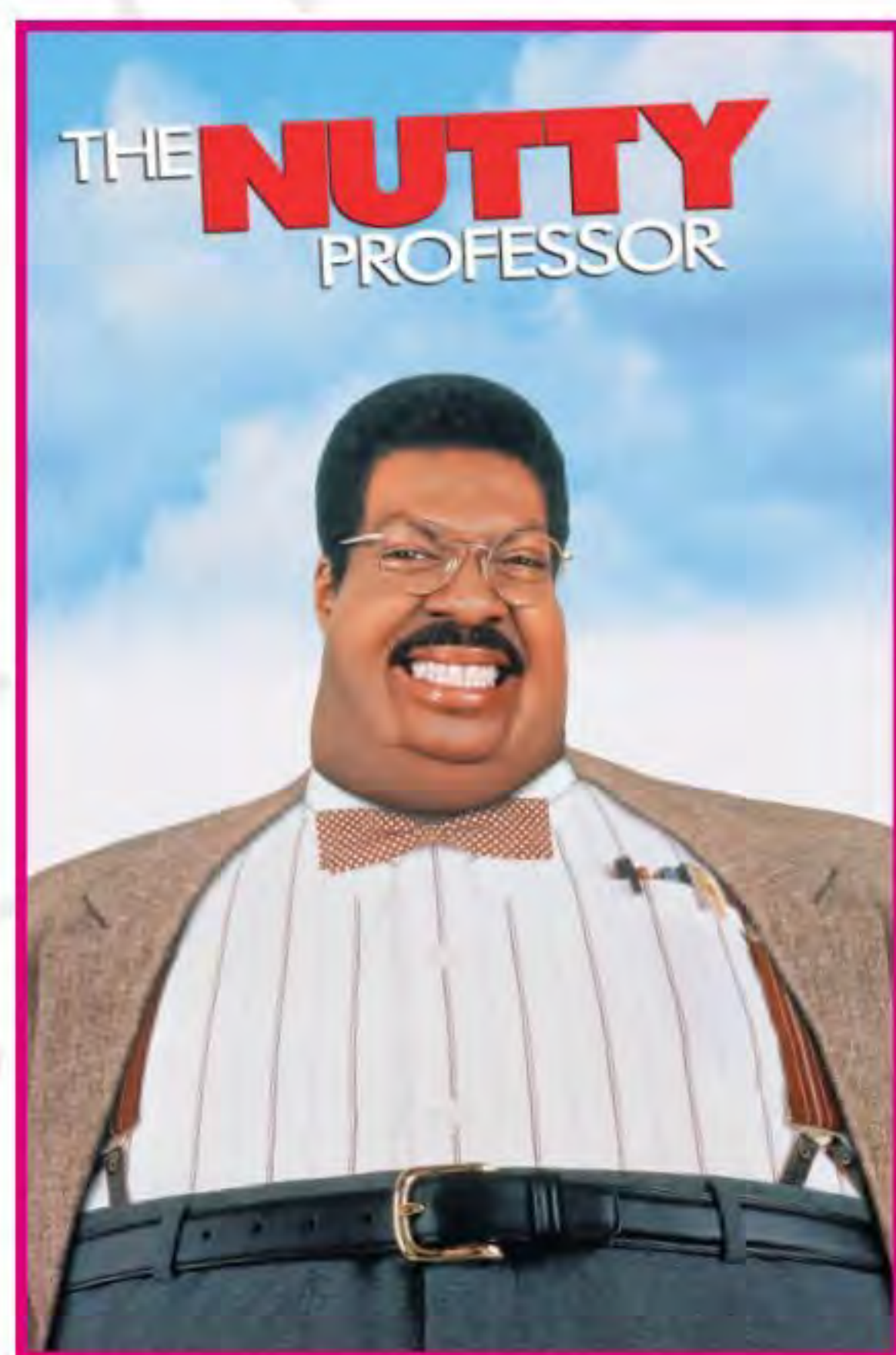
69 If you were a certain age in the '90s, this adaptation of the Chris Van Allsburg book is probably your *Goonies* moment. It was mainly such a huge success because of two things: some very fun special effects, and of course Robin Williams, who plays Alan Parrish, a child who has been trapped in a magical board game for 26 years. A sequel was released 22 years later in 2017.



The Nutty Professor

1996

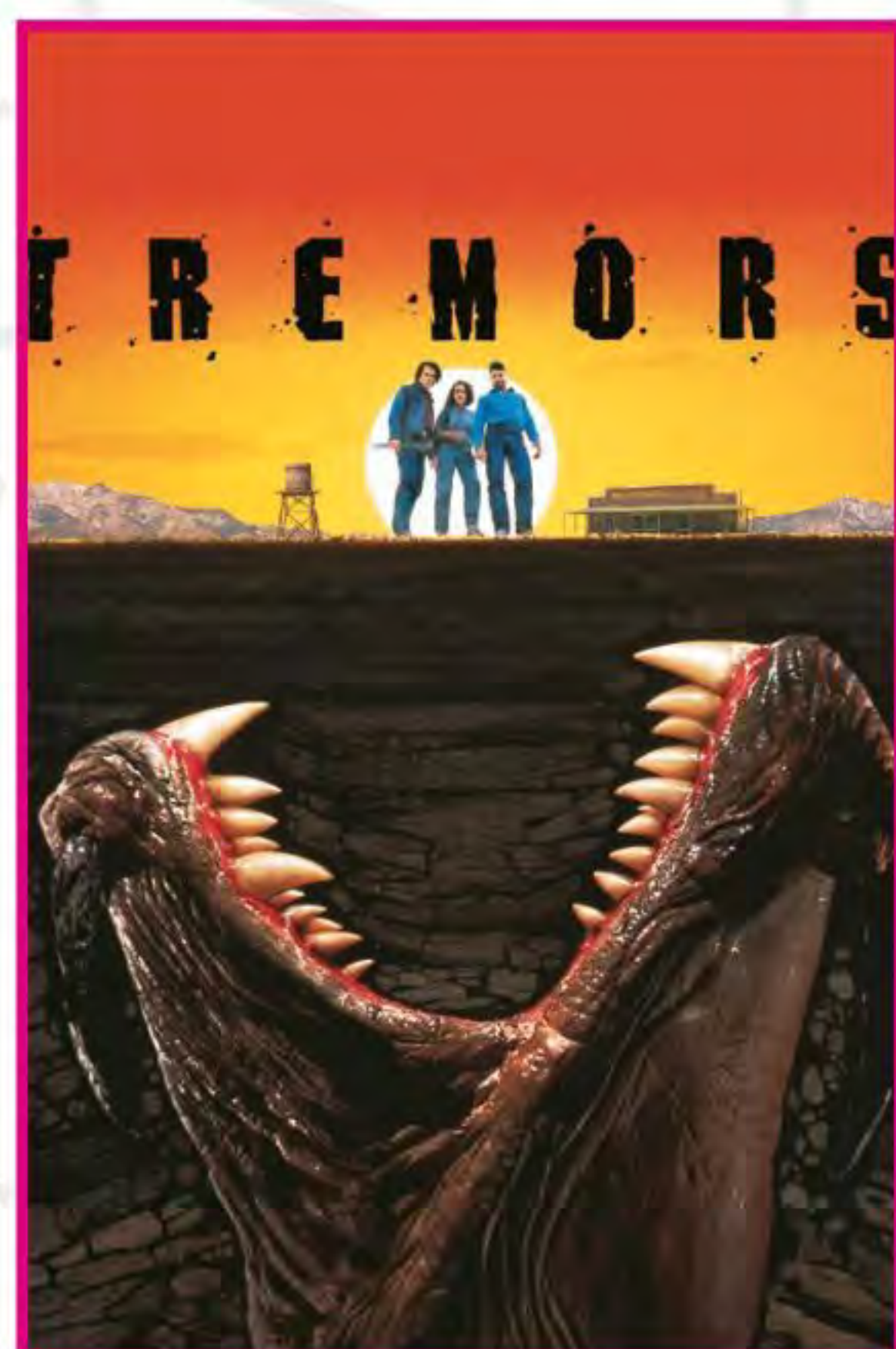
70 Eddie Murphy began moving into more family-orientated movies in the '90s, scoring big at the box office with this remake of the 1963 Jerry Lewis vehicle. In addition to playing the lead and of course his alter ego, Buddy Love, Murphy also found time to play five other characters in the movie. A sequel arrived in 2000.



Tremors

1990

73 If there's a better pair-up in the '90s than Kevin Bacon and Fred Ward, then we can't remember what it was. The duo are simply superb as two handymen who find themselves battling for survival against gigantic space worms in the backwater town of Perfection. Just forget all of the awful sequels that followed.



Sister Act

1992

71 Whoopi Goldberg's Oscar win for *Ghost* opened many doors, leading to this rather over-the-top caper that sees her going undercover as a nun after witnessing a killing by a local mobster. Goldberg is as watchable as ever, but Maggie Smith and Kathy Najimy are excellent, too. A less successful sequel appeared the following year.



Starship Troopers

1997

74 Paul Verhoeven's satirical take on war features gigantic bugs, atrocious dialogue and Doogie Howser MD in full Nazi regalia. Verhoeven made the film with the intention that "war makes fascists of us all," and while the message is just as relevant today, it's the action scene that will linger in the memory.



Pretty Woman

1990

72 Only Hollywood could take a relationship with a high-flying businessman and a low-class prostitute and turn it into a fairy tale blockbuster. While it's Richard Gere's least favourite movie (according to an interview in *The Telegraph*) it helped turn Julia Roberts into one of the highest-paid actresses of all time.

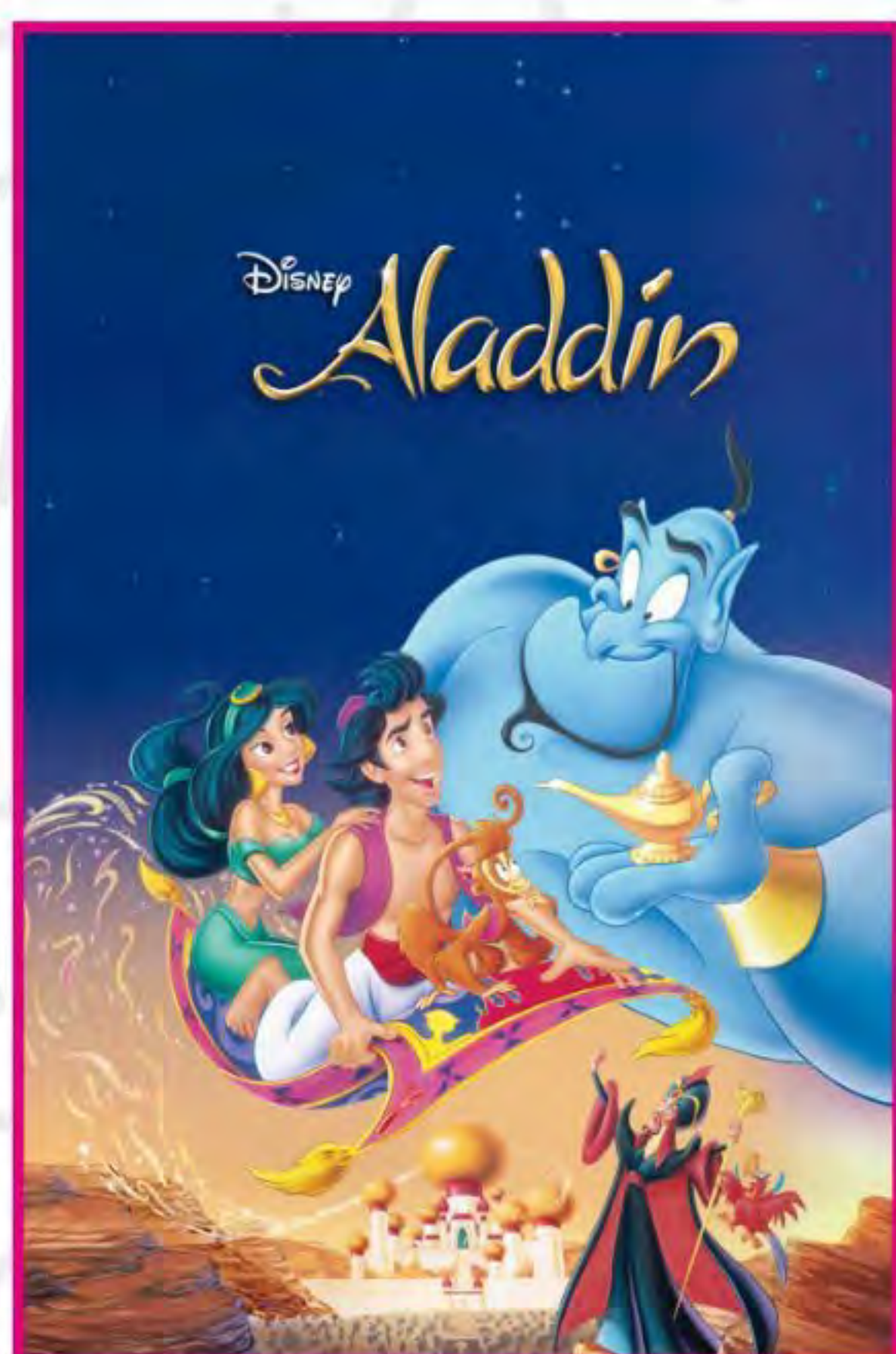


"Only Hollywood could take a relationship with a high-flying businessman and a low-class prostitute and turn it into a fairy tale blockbuster"

Aladdin

1992

75 A showcase for the comedic talents of the late Robin Williams (much of his improvisations were in fact kept in the final film), *Aladdin* became the first fully animated Disney movie to reach the top of the charts since the 1937 release of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. A fallout with Disney unfortunately meant that Williams didn't return for the direct sequel, though.



PULP FICTION



Pulp Fiction

1994

76 Quentin Tarantino's second movie was an epic crime caper, which cleverly appeared out of chronological order. It not only reignited John Travolta's languishing career, but also did wonders for Samuel L. Jackson, who steals the film from under the noses of Travolta and Bruce Willis as god-fearing hitman Jules Winnfield.

The Mummy

1999

77 Brendan Fraser channels Indiana Jones, and makes a rather engaging lead in this loose reboot of Universal's 1932 film of the same name. Its impressive \$415 million take at the box office inevitably led to two sequels, an animated series and a spin-off, *The Scorpion King*, which starred The Rock (as he was then known).



Cool Runnings

1993

78 It may have taken numerous creative liberties, but this lively sports comedy from Jon Turteltaub is still an enjoyable underdog story. Based on the events of the 1988 Winter Olympics, which featured a surprising entry from Jamaica, it's saved thanks to endearing performances from leads Leon, Doug E. Doug and John Candy's last good on-screen performance.



Edward Scissorhands

1990

79 Tim Burton's ridiculous gothic fairy tale largely works thanks to Johnny Depp's stoic portrayal of a lonely boy with scissors for hands. It's notable for being one of the last films to feature Vincent Price (in a role that was written specifically for him), and inspiring the naming of an extinct arthropod called *Kootenichela deppi*.



The Last Boy Scout

1991

80 You may have forgotten that Bruce Willis once played a washed-up detective who teamed up with Damon Wayans' disgraced quarterback, but we haven't. Shane Black's tight screenplay is full of sharp one-liners, and there's a great back and forth between the two leads, but that couldn't stop it flopping at the box office.





Jurassic Park

1993

81 Universal scored a colossal hit with Steven Spielberg's adaptation of Michael Crichton's popular novel about a dinosaur theme park that goes awry. Astonishing special effects (a mixture of CGI and puppet work) and exhilarating action pieces turned it into the highest-grossing film of its time, with a final gargantuan haul of \$914,691,118.



Batman Returns

1992

82 Tim Burton's sequel saw Michael Keaton continue his role as the caped crusader, and introduced two new villains, Michelle Pfeiffer as Cat Woman and Danny DeVito as the Penguin. Far darker than the original, the change in direction was too much for Warner Bros, who dropped Burton and Keaton for Joel Schumacher and Val Kilmer. Val Kilmer!

S U M M E R 1 9 9 3

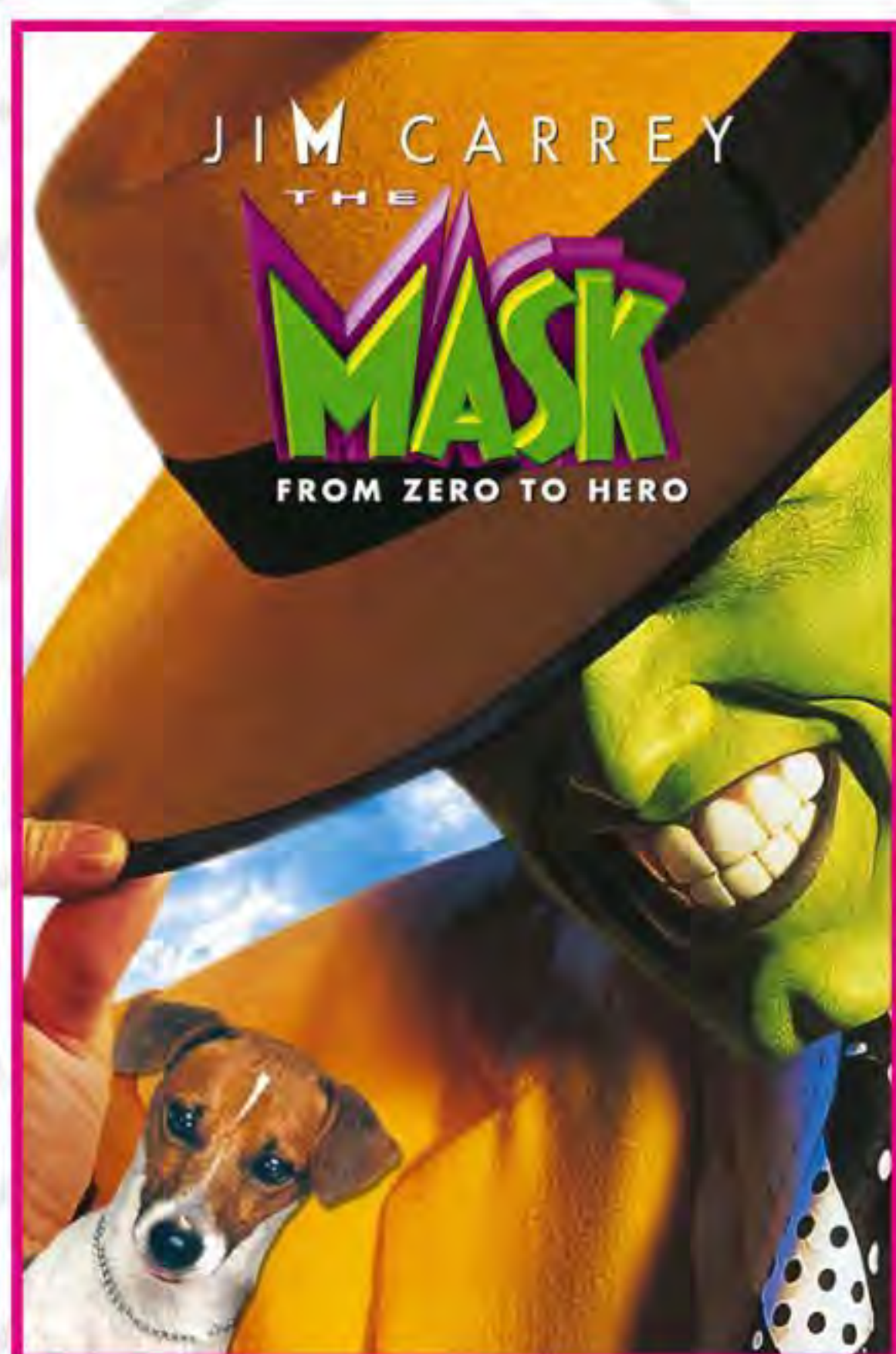


TM & © 1993 UNIVERSAL CITY STUDIOS, INC. & AMBLIN ENTERTAINMENT, INC.

The Mask

1994

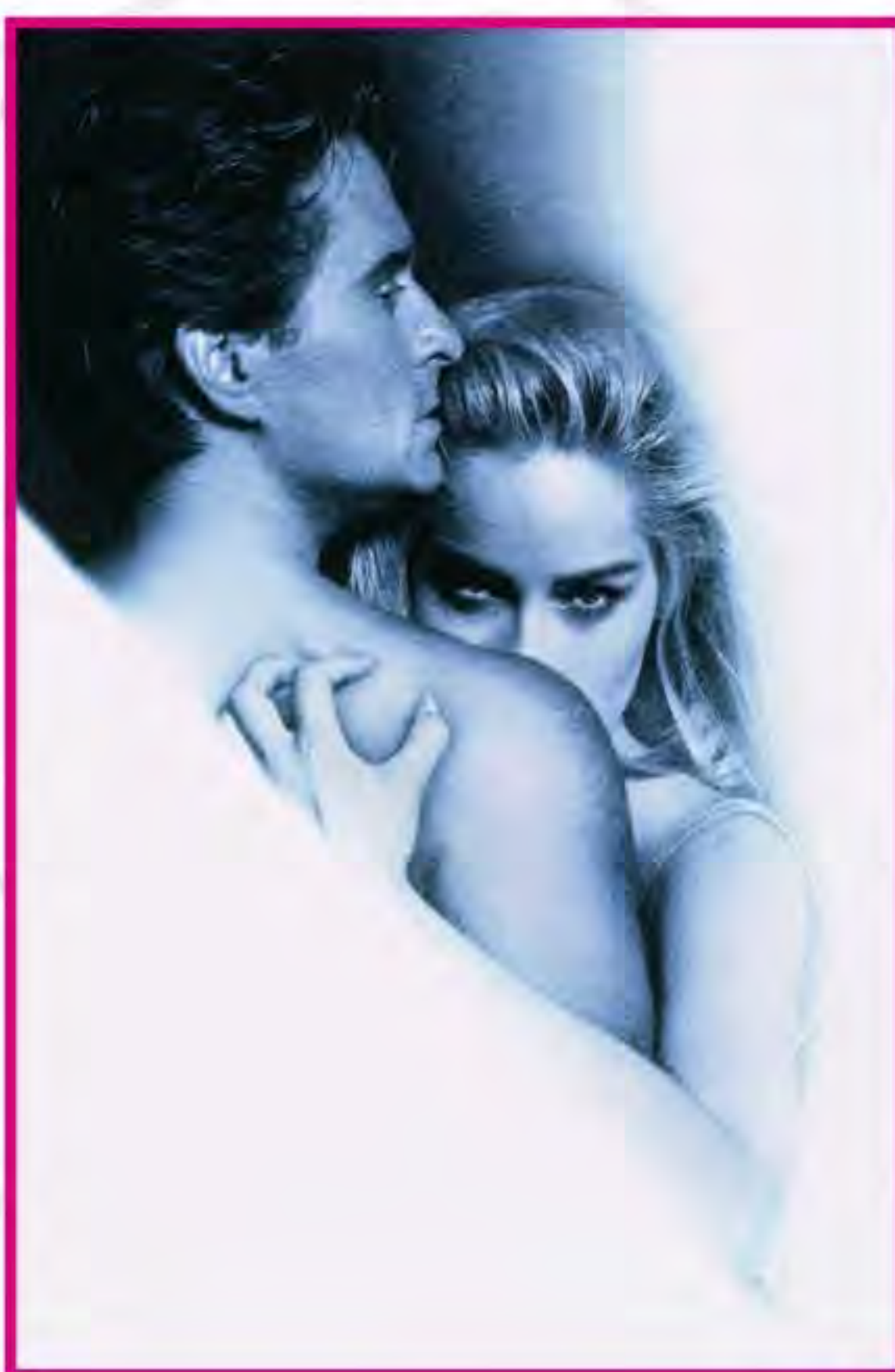
83 *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* was a solid calling card, but it was this interesting adaptation of an obscure comic series that cemented Jim Carrey's position as the '90s' comedy king. It's also notable for being the breakout role for Cameron Diaz. Despite its big box-office success, Carrey turned down \$10 million to star in a sequel.



Basic Instinct

1992

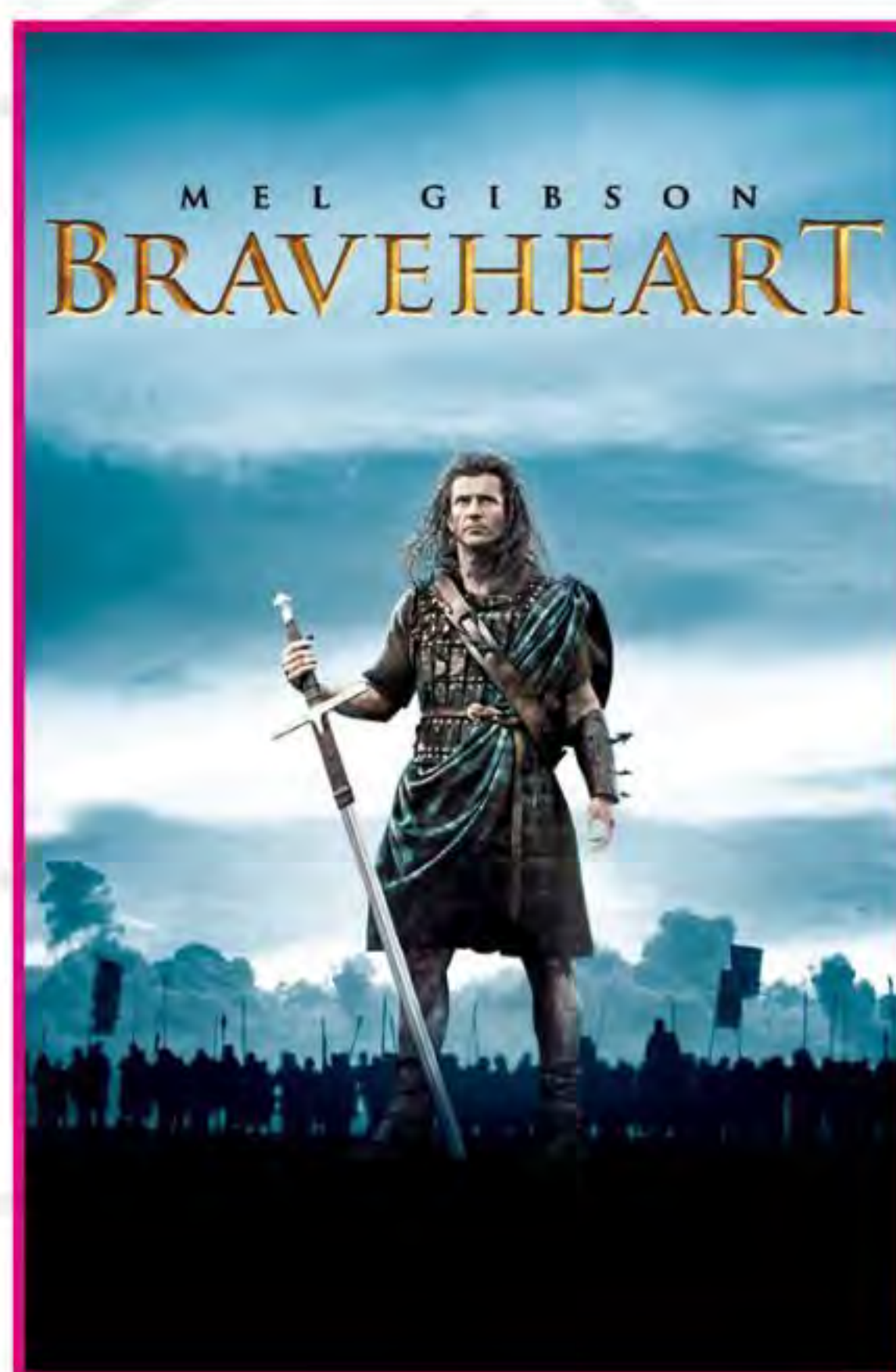
84 Best known for its infamous leg-crossing scene (filmed without Sharon Stone's knowledge), *Basic Instinct* generated controversy on release due to graphic depictions of violence and its negative attitudes towards homosexuals. Despite this, it performed strongly at the box office and turned Sharon Stone into a sex symbol for the rest of the decade.



Braveheart

1995

85 You can apparently fill a warehouse with the inaccuracies that appear in Mel Gibson's directorial debut. Despite that, it makes for some epic cinema thanks to gorgeous sweeping vistas, intense battle scenes and a spiteful performance from Patrick McGoohan as King Edward I. Hollywood didn't care about its inaccuracies, awarding *Braveheart* five Oscars.



Star Wars: The Phantom Menace

1999

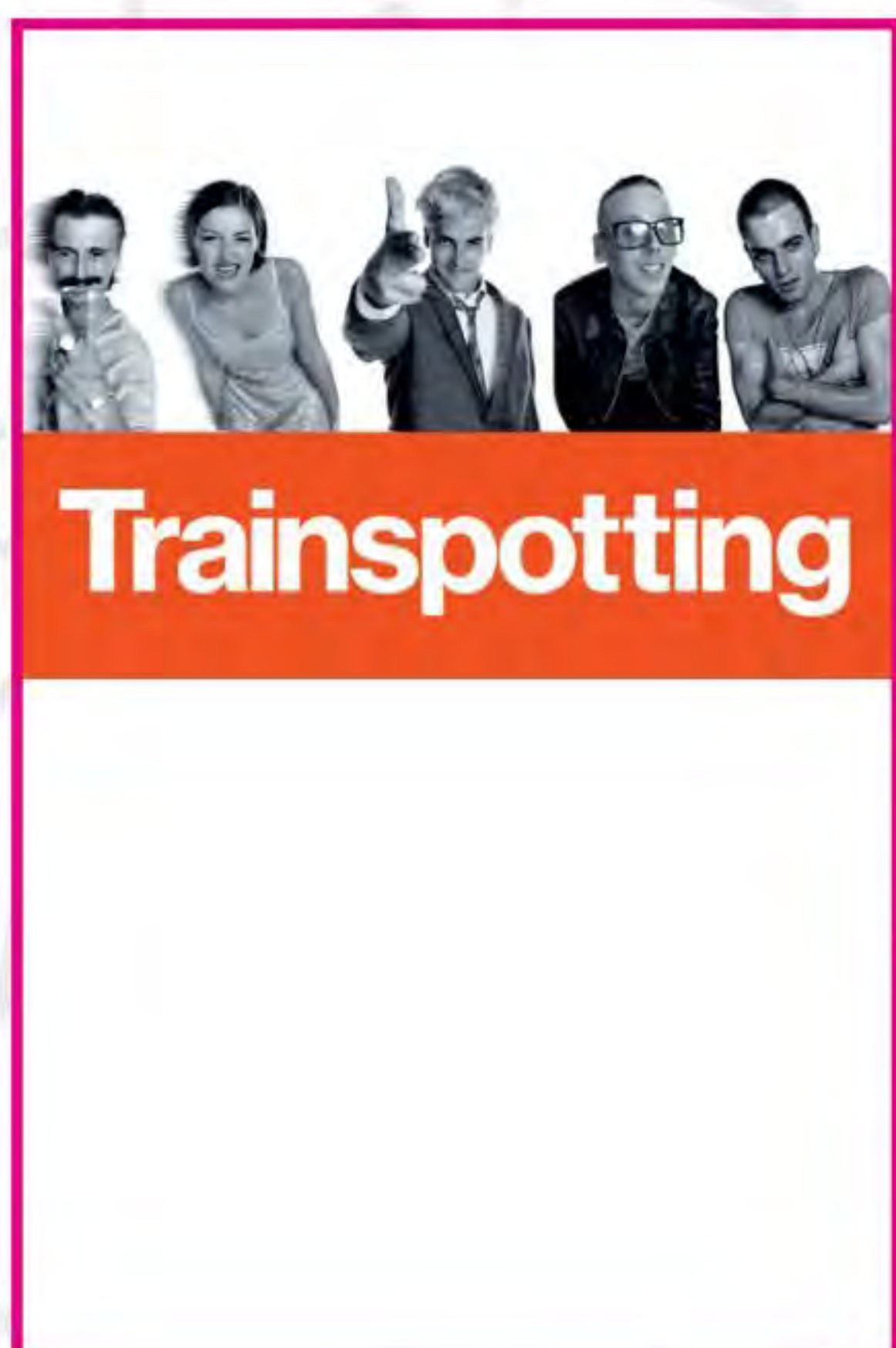
86 Universally scorned by die-hard fans, the return of *Star Wars* was huge. It kick-started a new generation of toys and videogames, became the first indication that Liam Neeson would turn into an unlikely action hero, and boasts the coolest lightsabre of all time.



Trainspotting

1996

87 There's no denying that very few films sum up the culture of the '90s as well as *Trainspotting* does. Ewan McGregor shines as heroin addict Mark Renton, and the role arguably led to his star rising in Hollywood. For a film that relies so heavily on music, it should come as no surprise to learn that it spawned two great soundtracks.



Seven

1995

88 David Fincher's first film after the divisive *Alien 3* proved exactly what he was capable of in terms of movie directing. It's an excellent thriller with one of the most talked about endings of the '90s. Kevin Spacey (who was unnamed in promotional material) absolutely steals the movie as the serial killer who is obsessed with the seven deadly sins.



The Rocketeer

1991

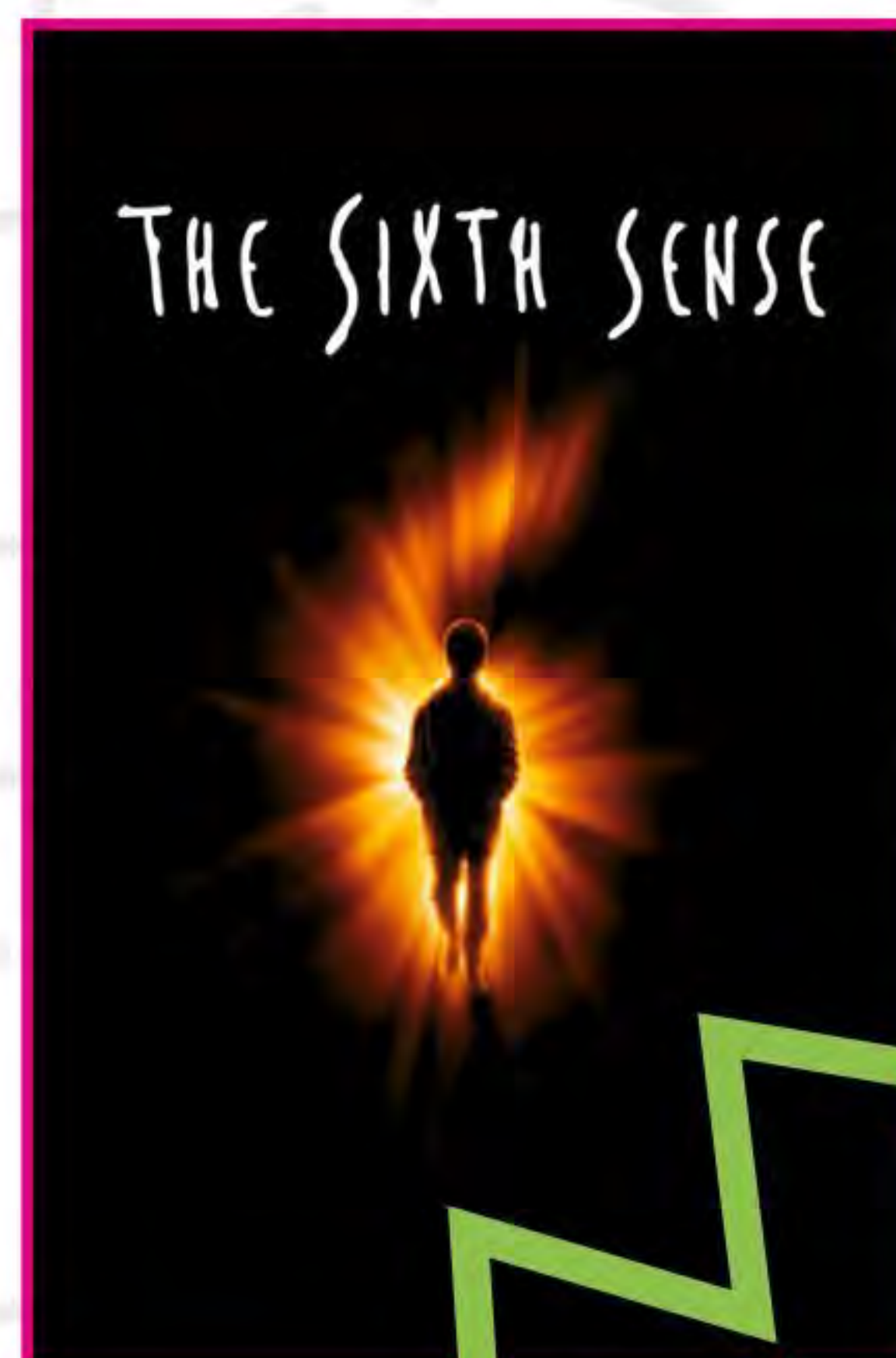
89 This charming family adventure never gets enough love, so we're doing our bit here. Set in the '30s, and based on a popular comic book character from the '80s, it's a loving homage to the matinee heroes of the '30s and '50s. Audiences didn't agree, though, and unfortunately it struggled to make back its \$40 million budget.



The Sixth Sense

1999

90 Haley Joel Osment gives a rather tremendous performance as the child who is capable of seeing dead people, in M Night Shyamalan's excellent horror movie *The Sixth Sense*. Bruce Willis is on equally fine form as a troubled child psychologist, while the movie's surprise twist has lost none of its impact all these years later.



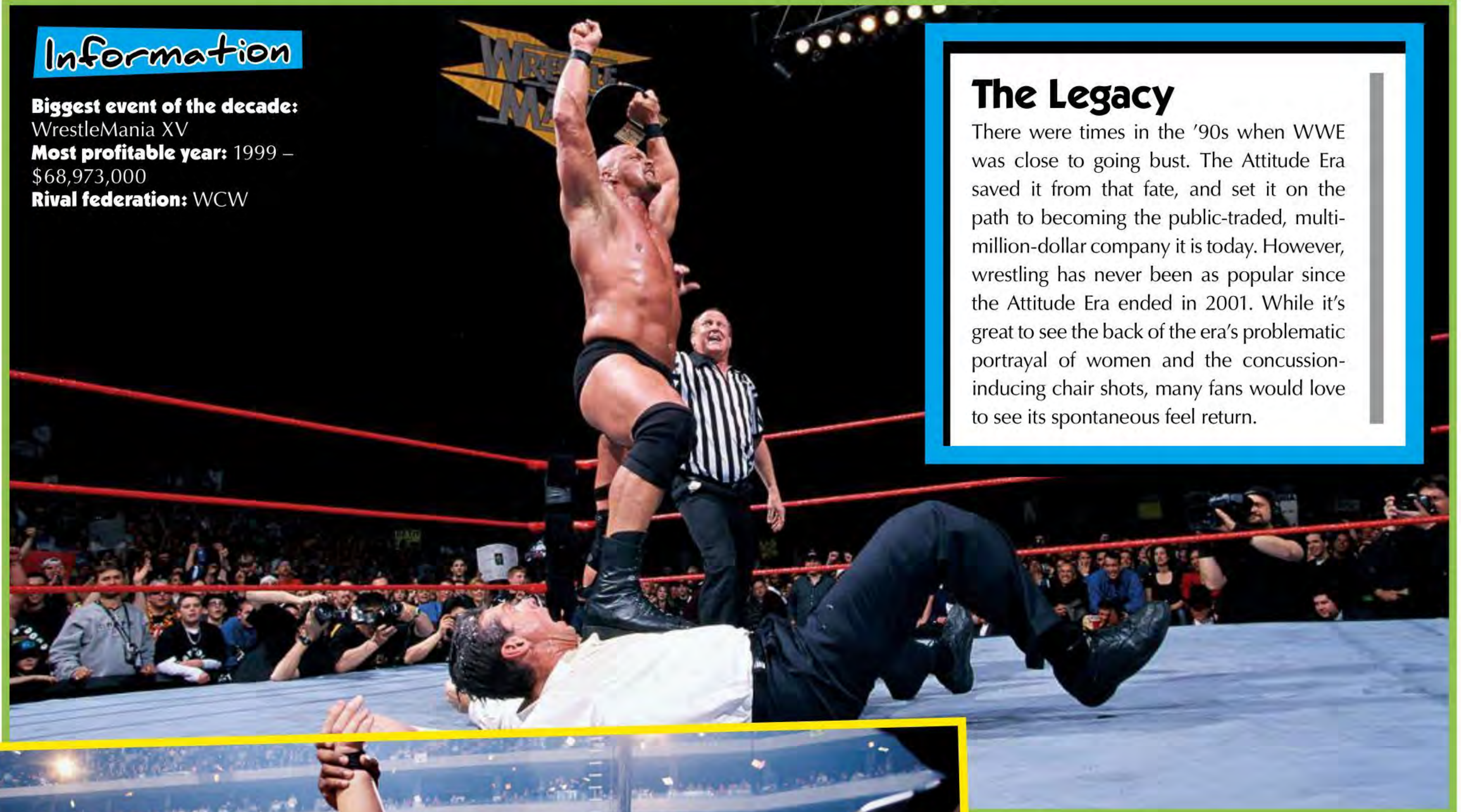
WWE

Information

Biggest event of the decade:
WrestleMania XV
Most profitable year: 1999 –
\$68,973,000
Rival federation: WCW

The Legacy

There were times in the '90s when WWE was close to going bust. The Attitude Era saved it from that fate, and set it on the path to becoming the public-traded, multi-million-dollar company it is today. However, wrestling has never been as popular since the Attitude Era ended in 2001. While it's great to see the back of the era's problematic portrayal of women and the concussion-inducing chair shots, many fans would love to see its spontaneous feel return.



There was an increase in risk-taking and violence in the Attitude Era. The WWE introduced matches that featured chairs, ladders, trash cans, barbed wire and big, risky falls. Wrestlers would covertly cut themselves with razors in big matches to add to the drama.



Mike Tyson was banned from boxing at the time of his appearance in WWE due to an infamous incident where he bit off a chunk of Evander Holyfield's ear in a title bout. That incident only helped to increase Tyson's fame, and ensured all eyes were on his WrestleMania appearance.

Wrestling fans of the '90s may remember Bret 'The Hitman' Hart, the British Bulldog and SummerSlam 92 from the early years of the decade, but, following a slump in popularity, it wasn't until the Attitude Era hit that wrestling became a worldwide sensation.

Towards the tail end of 1997, WWE began shifting away from being a product aimed primarily at kids and its traditional good-guys-versus-bad-guys template to take a more adult, edgy and controversial

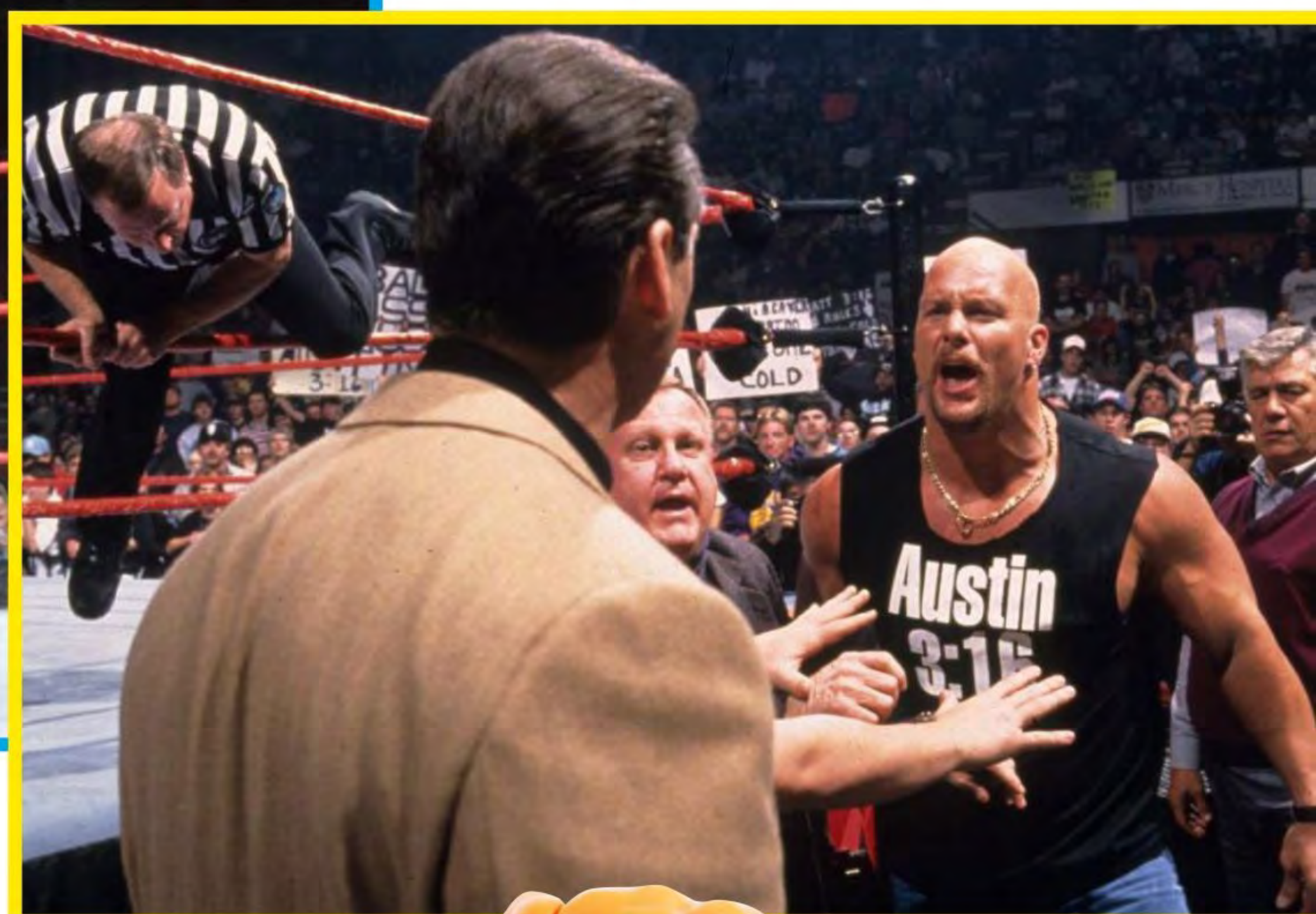
approach. Before you knew it, WWE (WWF at the time) had a new 'scratch' logo, wrestlers were smashing each other with chairs and crashing through tables, TV ratings had exploded, and wrestling was cool again. The Attitude Era had begun.

There were several stars that helped WWE attain this new level of cultural relevance – The Rock, Triple H, The Undertaker – but there was one man who led the charge: 'Stone Cold' Steve Austin. Austin's beer-swilling, middle-finger flipping, ass-kicking

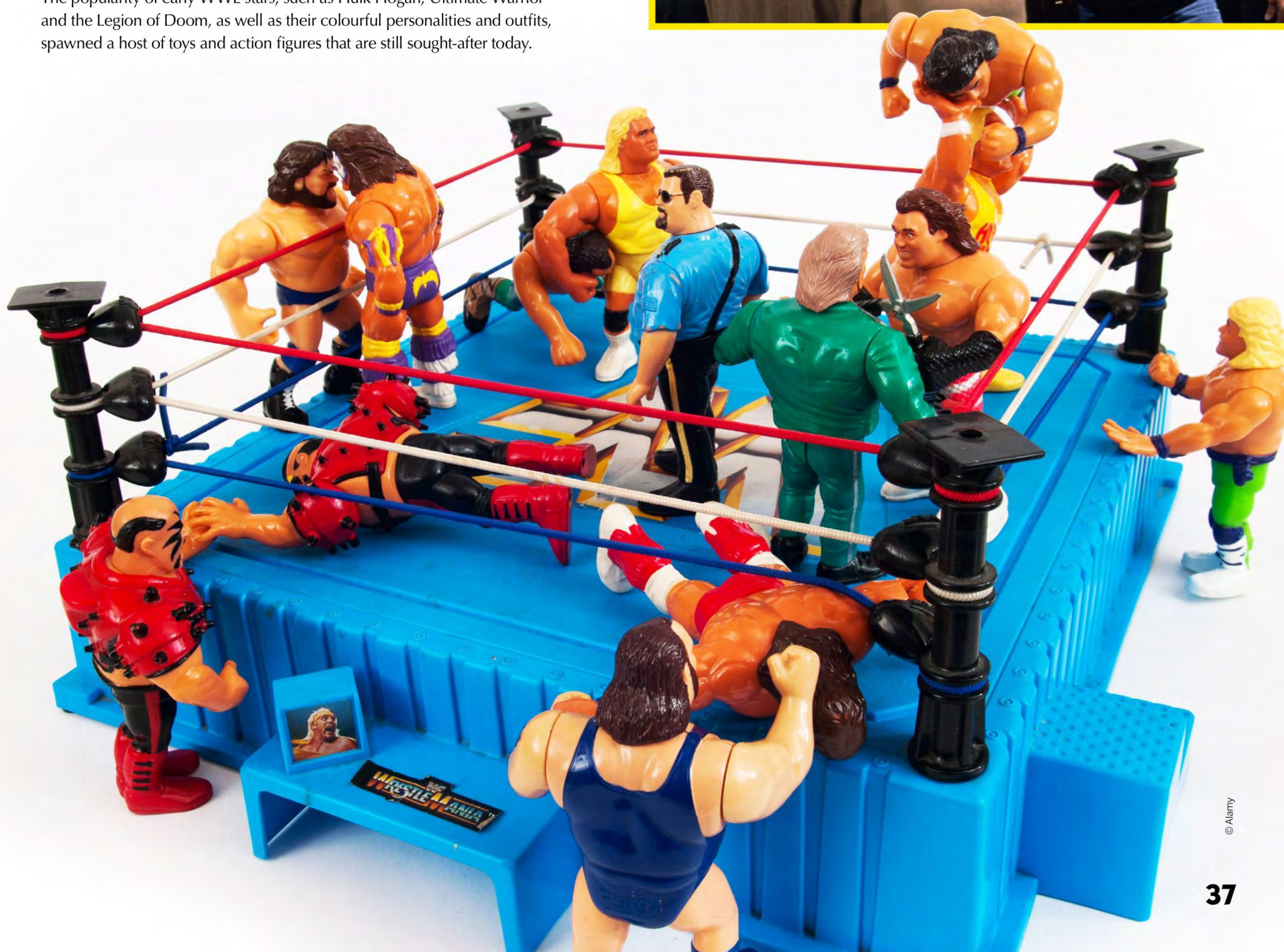
antics struck a chord with fans, and he became an anti-authoritarian icon, feuding with his evil, billionaire boss, Vince McMahon. When WWE brought Mike Tyson in as a special enforcer for WrestleMania XIV in 1998 – contested between Steve Austin and Shawn Michaels – WWE's hottest star and his defining feud with McMahon was exposed to a mainstream audience. That kicked the momentum the company had been building up to the next level, and gave us the most popular era in wrestling history.



▼
The Attitude Era boom fed off the amazing chemistry between 'Stone Cold' Steve Austin and his real-life boss and on-screen rival, Vince McMahon. Fans who had to pay deference to their bosses in real life could live vicariously through Austin's rebellious attitude.



▼
The popularity of early WWE stars, such as Hulk Hogan, Ultimate Warrior and the Legion of Doom, as well as their colourful personalities and outfits, spawned a host of toys and action figures that are still sought-after today.



THE FRESH PRINCE OF BEL-AIR

Anyone who watched *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* during its run from 1990 to 1996 will undoubtedly be able to recite the series' backstory. It was right there in the glorious opening theme song, *Yo Home to Bel Air*, which was written and performed by DJ Jazzy Jeff and rapper-turned-actor Will Smith, who was undoubtedly the star of the show.

It was the tale of how the Fresh Prince's life got flipped-turned upside down when he was forced to move from a rough neighbourhood. The Fresh Prince tells us how he became the prince of a town called Bel Air. But there was so much more to this show than that earworm, Quincy Jones composition, because the Fresh Prince's working-class, West Philadelphia background frequently clashed with his auntie and uncle's upper-class family.

Cue lots of humour in this classic NBC sitcom, as Smith – whose character almost bore the same name (he is William in the show, but Willard in real-life) – proved to be sharp-witted, charismatic and confident. Smith agreed to sign up because he was spending money like it was going out of fashion, and he owed \$2.8 million to the taxman. He didn't even know how to act at that time.

But he learned fast. Although the first season underperformed, the series soon picked up and, while it was formulaic and moralistic, it addressed race and class, and gave viewers a good laugh. Prodding the pretentious outlook of Uncle Phil, Hilary and Carlton provided the comedy, but it was gentle and fun, for this was a show that stood up because of its characters, and it helped make Will Smith the star he is today.



Much of the comedy revolved around Smith's interaction with the Banks' family. Younger cousin Ashley Banks (played by Tatyana Ali) looked up to Will as a big brother, and became rebellious as she grew older, which caused tension. The conservative Republican outlook of Carlton Banks and father Philip was also played to comedic effect.



THE FRESH PRINCE OF BEL-AIR



Having peered around the living room from the top of the stairs and noticed no one was around, Carlton (played by Alfonso Ribeiro) enthusiastically made his way down, inserted a CD into the hi-fi, made some final checks that he was alone, and then energetically danced and mimed to Tom Jones' *It's Not Unusual*. Until Will Smith appeared...



According to *The New York Times* in 1990, the producers, writers and actors wrestled with how much rap culture they should insert into the show. They feared alienating the mass audience they were targeting. Co-writer Susan Borowitz said the focus was on exploring cultural differences and bringing the characters to the fore.

'The Fresh Prince' had been Will Smith's stage name from the late 1980s. Back then, he formed part of a hugely successful hip-hop duo with DJ Jazzy Jeff (who starred in the TV show as Smith's best friend, Jazz). The pair received a Grammy for best rap performance in 1989 for the song *Parents Just Don't Understand*.

The Legacy

The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air was the first to show a truly wealthy African-American family on television, and it also cemented hip-hop in pop culture. Will Smith became a major star: his single *Summertime* in 1991 was his most successful, and he began to make movies while still filming *Fresh Prince*. He broke out in *Six Degrees of Separation* in 1993, starred in *Bad Boys* in 1995, and thumped an alien in *Independence Day* in 1996, before appearing in *Men in Black* in 1997, the year he began his musical solo career.

Information

Created by: Andy and Susan Borowitz
First aired: 1990
Number of seasons: Six (148 episodes)



TAMAGOTCHI

The idea behind the Tamagotchi was simple: what if you could take your pet with you everywhere you went? Tamagotchi creator Aki Maita answered that question by developing a small, egg-shaped digital device with a keychain that made it easy to carry with you.

You started with an egg on your screen, which was meant to be deposited on earth by an alien species, according to Tamagotchi's own mythos. You would wait for the egg to hatch and, eventually, out would pop a

small pet. Using the three buttons under the screen, you had to feed it when it was hungry, bath it, play with it, give it medicine if it got sick, and clean up its poos. If you neglected your Tamagotchi, the poor creature would pass away and you would have to start all over again.

One of the most exciting moments for any Tamagotchi owner was that moment when your pet would evolve to the next stage in its development. Your Tamagotchi would grow into different forms depending on how

well you looked after it, though it wasn't clear exactly what you had to do to get each different form, so you never quite knew what you were going to get.

Whether it was that sense of mystery, the portability, or some other factor, the Tamagotchi struck a nerve. The device exploded beyond the borders of its native Japan to become a monster success, selling \$150 million worth in seven months, as taking care of a virtual pet became the primary preoccupation of kids across the globe.

"You had to feed it, bath it, play with it, give it medicine if it got sick, and clean up its poos. If you neglected it, the creature would pass away"



▶ The wild success of the Tamagotchi meant that Bandai was keen to follow up on the first generation of Tamagotchis. New versions like the Tamagotchi Angel and Tamagotchi Ocean quickly followed the original release. Bandai later followed up with the Tamagotchi Connection, which used infrared to connect devices.

▶ Tamagotchis came in a variety of colours, so theoretically you could choose your favourite. However, the device's popularity led to shortages in the early days, so often the choice was between taking what you could get, if you could get anything at all, or waiting and hoping your favourite colour came back in stock.

▶ Bandai's Aki Maita came up with the idea for Tamagotchi after watching an advert where a young boy tries to take his pet turtle with him to school before being told he couldn't, and that his reptilian friend had to stay at home.

Information

Manufacturer: Bandai
First released: 1997
Expect to pay: £30

▼
You looked after your Tamagotchi using a simple menu system laid out in two strips along the top and bottom of the screen. This included the options to feed your pet a meal or snack, and a game option where you had to guess whether your Tamagotchi would turn right or left.

The Legacy

The Tamagotchi caused a mini-storm due to kids bringing them to school to keep their digital pets happy and healthy, to the point that many schools banned them to cut down on distractions. They needn't have worried too much, because the Tamagotchi craze died down after a few years, though Bandai has continued to release new iterations, including a limited edition run of the original Tamagotchi in 2017. In 2018, Bandai Namco released a mobile version for Android and iOS called My Tamagotchi Forever.

STORE HOURS
MON 9-6
TUE 9-6
WED 9-6
THU 9-6
FRI 9-6
SAT 10-7
SUN CLOSED



Compact Discs
Records
Tapes

FRIENDS

F•R•I•E•N•D•S

The one US sitcom that millions of us loved

Every decade has its defining pop-culture moments. But for the millions of viewers glued to NBC's warm and lovable sitcom, *Friends*, it came towards the end of an episode that debuted on 9 November 1995. It showed Rachel clearing up at the Central Perk coffee shop and Ross walking in, sparking an argument and leaving. As Rachel sat with her head in her hands, Ross could be seen standing by the door. Rachel walks across, fumbles with the locks, finally lets him back in and the pair find themselves in a loving embrace. It was Ross and Rachel's very first kiss. And it felt just as right for those watching as it did for the characters.

But then it was always meant to be that way – at least up to a point. Conceived in 1993 and set in Manhattan, show creators David Crane and Martha Kauffman had long envisaged six people exploring the madness of their mid-20s, with all of the will-they-won't-they romances that go along with it. Yet the main love story was not actually going to involve Ross and Rachel but Joey and Monica instead. Kauffman believed them to be the most sexual of the characters, but that changed as the script-writing got underway. Could it have been so different?

Well yes, it could have. For starters, Crane and Kauffman – who began work on the programme at a low point in their careers when their futures seemed uncertain following the canning of their CBS show, *Family Album* – had initially looked to call the show *Insomnia Cafe*. Drawing on their own earlier lives as college graduates finding their way in New York, the pair penned a seven-page pitch. But when NBC snapped up the idea and commissioned the pilot script, they changed the name to *Friends Like Us*. It then became known internally as *Six of One* before everyone agreed on *Friends*.

Some of the cast members may have been different too, since there were 75 actors to choose from for each part. Courtney Cox was originally earmarked to play Rachel, but she insisted on the part of Monica (I know!). Meanwhile, NBC wanted Matt LeBlanc to become Joey despite Crane and Kauffman



being less keen (và' fà a Napoli, as Joey would say). That, however, worked very well, with LeBlanc perfectly playing up the dim element of the much-loved character that made him such a success.

The series was also fortunate to get Jennifer Aniston, since she had been contracted to the CBS show *Muddling Through* but it failed and freed her to join *Friends*. Meanwhile, Craig Bierko almost became constant joker Chandler instead of Matthew Perry. However, Lisa Kudrow's excellent audition and role as Ursula in *Mad About You* saw her take the part of Phoebe as first choice. The scriptwriters also wrote the part of Ross with David Schwimmer in mind. All six would become firm household names within months.

GOING GLOBAL

The first episode premiered on NBC on 22 September 1994, introducing fashion enthusiast Rachel, her childhood best friend Monica, Monica's paleontologist brother Ross, quirky self-taught musician and masseuse Phoebe, struggling actor Joey and the acridly witty statistical analyst

Chandler. An original pilot had also included a middle-aged man called Pat The Cop who was supposed to be an older voice lending relationship advice – something the network deemed important because they feared too few viewers would be interested in a show about people in their 20s. Pat The Cop never made it to the screen, however.

Instead, the six-strong ensemble cast were left to forge their own way, mistakes and all. Filmed mostly before a live audience at Warner Bros' studios in California (except for cliffhanger episodes), and carrying a laughter track, most of the action took place in Monica and Rachel's West Village apartment, the hub of the show, and in Joey and Chandler's flat across the hall. It would take around five hours to shoot each episode, each of which lasted about 20 to 22 minutes. Within that time would be lots of jokes, much energy and a good dollop of drama. Phrases such as Joey's "How you doin'?" as well as "We were on a break," and "friend zone" became part of the show's easy, reliable charm.

In many ways, it really did put the 'situation' into 'situation comedy', because the laughs came from the innovative scenarios the



Rachel's haircut

As well as being one of the most iconic comedy characters of the 1990s, Rachel Green also turned heads because of her bouncy, smooth, full-bodied, layered hair. Created by celebrity stylist Chris McMillan, and sported over the first couple of seasons, 'The Rachel' became a classic cut and a star in its own right, and it was aped by women the world over.

Jennifer Aniston, however, was no big fan. The actress said the hairdo was far too high maintenance, and it was actually just one of 29 haircuts worn by Rachel over the course of the ten seasons, according to *Cosmopolitan* magazine. Its popularity has endured, though: it even made a comeback towards the end of 2017.



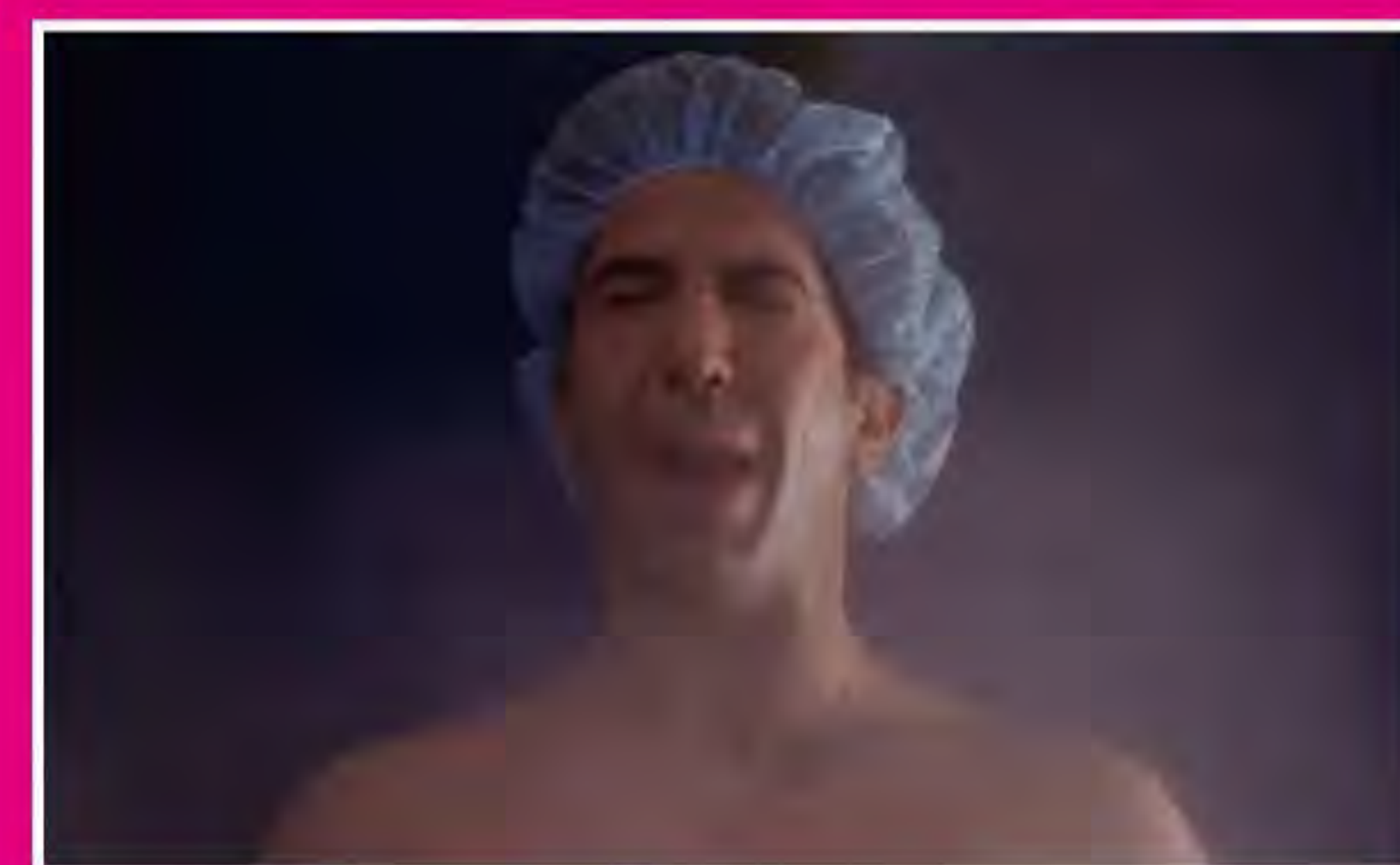
BEST EPISODES



The One with the Prom Video

Season 2: Episode 14

Considered one of, if not the best *Friends* episode, this gem introduced 'Fat Monica' in an undiscovered senior prom video. It also saw Joey gift a bewildered Chandler a gold, engraved bracelet, and Phoebe declaring Ross and Rachel "lobsters" – falling in love and mating for life.



The One with Ross's Tan

Season 10: Episode 3

For a pure slapstick and laugh-out-loud moment, little beats Ross's failure to work out how a tanning booth is supposed to work. After taking too long to count to five – "One Mississippi..." – he accidentally sprays himself twice in the front, goes back to rectify the mistake and sprays himself twice more.



The One with the Embryos

Season 4: Episode 12

A personal quiz ends in a tie and goes into a Lightning Round – "30 seconds, all the questions you can answer." Monica puts up the girls' apartment to the boys' birds but they come unstuck when trying to figure out Chandler's job. "Transponder," shouts Rachel.

"That's not even a word," Monica screams.



“It put the ‘situation’ into ‘situation comedy’, as the laughs came from the innovative scenarios the characters found themselves in as much as what they said”

characters found themselves in as much as from what they said. The six would hang out in the Central Perk coffee shop where barista Gunther would have his eye on Rachel. There were other love interests too, including Chandler’s loud girlfriend, Janice (“Oh. My. God!”); Ross’s wife-cum-ex-wife, Emily Waltham (played by Brit Helen Baxendale); and Monica’s older boyfriend, Richard Burke (aka Tom Selleck of *Magnum, P.I.*).

It certainly struck a chord with viewers, hitting its stride from the second season thanks to high-quality writing. ‘The One After the Superbowl’ (all the episodes start with ‘The One’, except for the pilot and finale) gained 52.9 million US viewers in that second season, with other audience figures hovering around the 24 million mark. Viewers learned of the characters’ back stories – Phoebe’s mother’s suicide and Chandler’s crossdressing, Las Vegas-star father – and they religiously followed the get-togethers and break-ups.

Indeed, such was *Friends*’ global popularity, the series four finale, which saw Ross marry Emily, was filmed in London as a sort of thank you to British fans. Drama was brought to the fore with Ross saying Rachel’s name at the ceremony, and Monica and Chandler ending up sleeping together. But such goings-on

kept fans hooked, and the funny scripts continued. After all, what would *Friends* be if the laughs were not flowing? *Friends* was as much about Phoebe strangling the words of her song, *Smelly Cat*, Joey and Chandler’s obsession with the foosball table, Monica’s overweight past, and the fiercely competitive Geller Cup held every Thanksgiving as it was the compelling storylines.

LEGACY

The series was so popular, it maintained an impressive ten-season run, ending in May 2004 with a tearful finale that saw Rachel taking a job in Paris and Ross rushing to the airport to declare his love for her. At the same time, Monica, Chandler and their adopted twins made their final preparations ahead of moving to the suburbs but, just before everyone parted, there was a chance for one last cup of coffee. It was a fitting end, and a staggering 52.46 million people tuned in in the US, with millions more around the globe.

Certainly the show’s impact was strong. By the time it had finished, the world may well have been ‘so over’ trying to mimic Rachel’s unique haircut. Yet *Friends* had become part and parcel of Western culture. Even so, it was perhaps time for a break. There were echoes of the series in the New York-set sitcom *How I*

Met Your Mother, which debuted in 2005, and Joey had a spin-off series, but the heights of *Friends* were hard to reach.

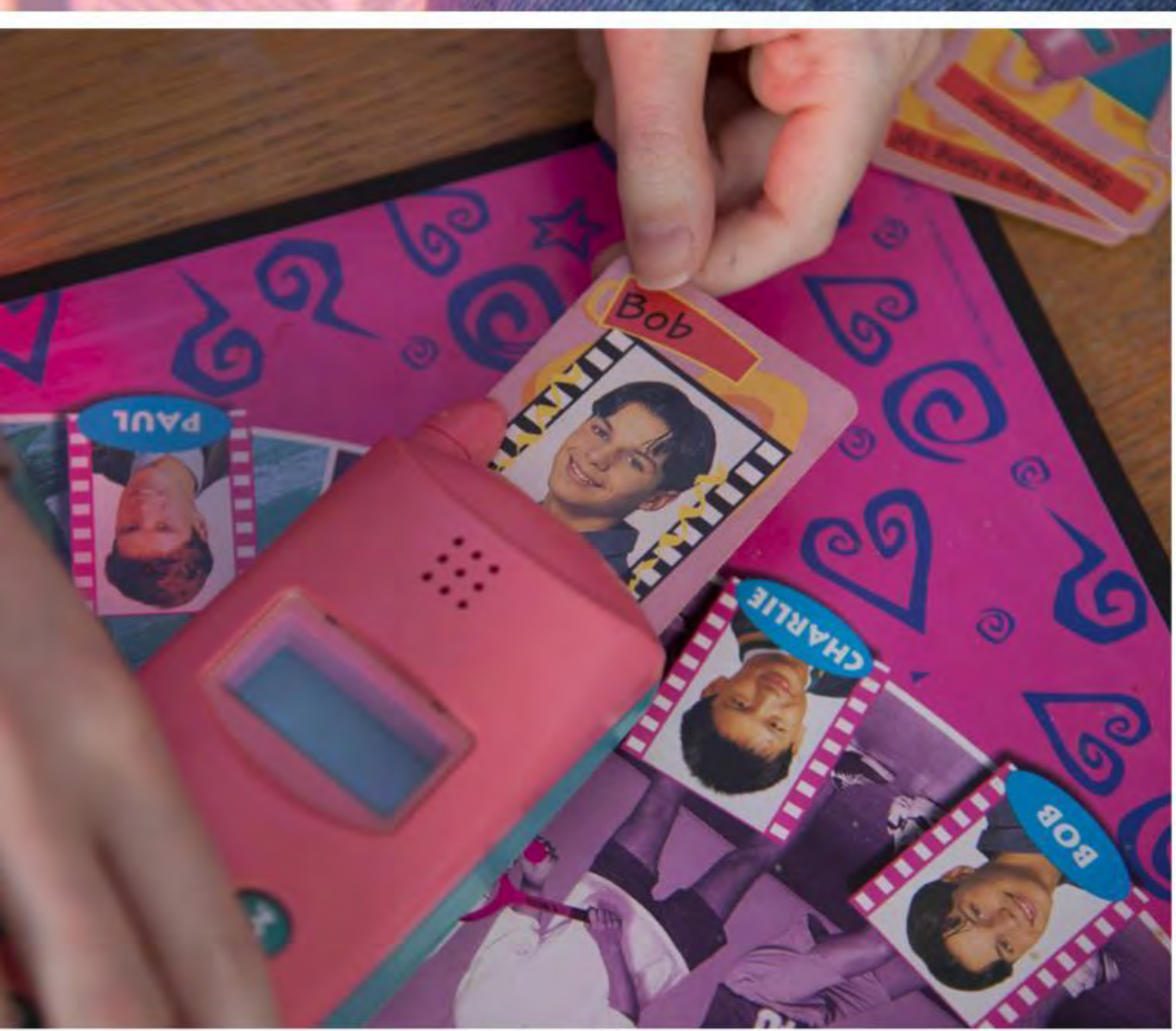
Not that it has ever felt like the end. *Friends* has barely been off the TV since 2004, allowing new audiences to enjoy its funny, relatable characters, and there’s even a touring celebration of the programme with full-scale sets for fans to enjoy. But while Netflix has taken up the entire series, and the programme is also shown on Comedy Central, some people have sought to negatively re-evaluate the programme, claiming there were clear signs of homophobia, transphobia, fat-shaming, sexism and stereotyping throughout.

But has that dented *Friends*’ relevance today? Arguably not, given that issues of femininity, sexuality, homophobia and body image are as prevalent as they’ve always been. Certainly, *Friends* may be clearly of its era, but its humour transcends generations. It has also made stars of its cast, who were being paid a cool \$1 million per episode by season 10, with each of them enjoying varying degrees of success on the big and small screen. As for *Friends* itself, Crane says it will never return, but adds: “right now, it’s preserved exactly as it should be.”

▶ Dream Phone was designed to be played by two to four players, but forming teams was also a popular option. The winners would have to fight over their newfound crush themselves, however.



▶ Different editions of Dream Phone came with their very own sets of hunks. So if you were playing in the UK, you'd be calling Bob and Charlie, whereas Carlos and Spencer were on the line in the US version.



▶ Aside from the various 'boy' cards, players could also use additional cards like 'Mum says hang up' to keep their opponents from winning the game.



DREAM PHONE

Information

Original Manufacturer Milton Bradley
First Released 1991
Expect to pay £25 (for an original set)

If you ever played Dream Phone, there was no forgetting it. The board game had the Dream Phone itself as the centrepiece, a giant bright pink phone in the middle of the table. The board was anchored around the phone, as was all the action.

But what was its purpose? The idea of the game is that one of 24 guys fancies you, and you need to find out who. Each player has photo cards with a guy on and his phone number. By calling each number on the Dream Phone, you'd get a clue as to who the guy is. Clues would range from useful ("He doesn't like pizza") to vague ("He looks cool in whatever he wears") to unhelpful ("I know who it is... but I'm not telling! Ha ha!").

Using the clues, you eliminate potential guys one-by-one until you're confident enough to guess who the actual guy who fancies you is. The guys themselves range from geeky nerds to blond-haired jocks, who all have distinguishing features such as playing baseball or listening to music or eating popcorn. This makes it easier for the player to eliminate them.

Even though Dream Phone seemed like a throwaway concept for a game, it actually required brainwork to narrow down the list of guys, making it surprisingly challenging. The Dream Phone itself also meant that there was some impressive technology at the heart of it all, making for a talking point (of course) for those playing it.

The Legacy

Dream Phone was released around the same time as Guess Who, another board game by Milton Bradley. It was the latter that would go on to have a lasting impact, thanks to its broader appeal (Dream Phone was quite clearly targeted at girls). Even so, you can buy a modern, updated version of Dream Phone, which still uses a phone as its centrepiece – albeit not a bright pink one any more!

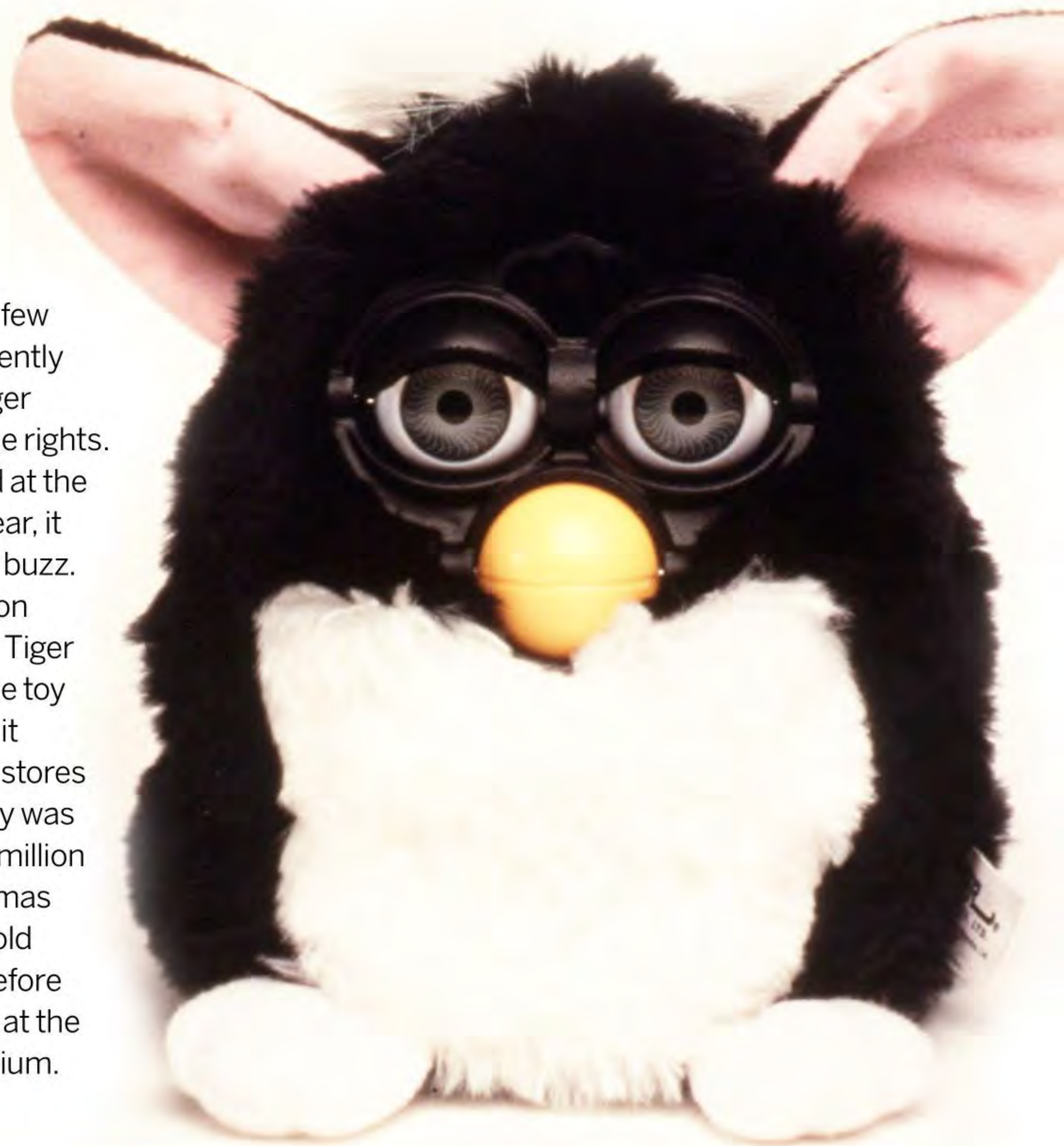
FURBY

The 1990s brought us toy phenomenons like no other. From Japanese electronic pets that became *the* must-have accessory in school playgrounds to plastic space rangers from hit Pixar films, these toys may have had short runs at the top, but when they were there they were untouchable. That's the story of the 'Furbish'-talking Furby, a memorable robot toy that took the world by storm from 1998 to 2000.

Creator David Hampton had visited American International Toy Fair in February 1997. He saw the Tamagotchi first-hand, and while it would go on to be a mega hit in its own right, the inventor wanted to create an electronic toy that evolved and adapted to its owner. It took nine months for Hampton and partner Caleb Chung to build their first

prototype, and while it had a few issues to begin with, it apparently impressed manufacturer Tiger Electronics enough to buy the rights.

When the toy was debuted at the same toy fair the following year, it generated a huge amount of buzz. By the time the holiday season rolled around, manufacturer Tiger Electronics was expecting the toy to do well – but it did so well, it immediately sold out across stores worldwide. Demand for Furby was incredible that year, with 1.8 million units sold by the time Christmas drew to a close. The brand sold another 1.4 million in 1999 before major interest began to fade at the beginning of the new millennium.



Did you know the Furby was banned from the premises of the National Security Agency (NSA) in 1999 due to concerns it was a security risk? It sparked a worldwide concern that the toy had the potential to record state secrets and other classified information. In reality, Furby wasn't capable of recording anything.



While the original line of Furbies didn't really have the ability to 'learn' English, later models – such as the iOS/Android-connected line in 2012 and Furby Party Rockers in 2013 – did include chips designed to adapt to a user with changing personalities and enhanced phrases.



The original Furby launched with a language known as 'Furbish', and was designed to gradually start using English words over time. Contrary to concerns at the time, Furby didn't really 'learn' English, but was pre-programmed to gradually start saying words such as 'Hello!' the more it was used. This was true even for models sold in non-English-speaking countries.



▼ In December 1998 – at the height of ‘Furbymania’ – Warner Bros filed a lawsuit against manufacturer Tiger Electronics due to the similarities with Furby and its own line of Gremlin ‘Mogwai’ toys. According to reports, the two firms came to an undisclosed seven-figure settlement, although Warner Bros had disputed such a claim.

The Legacy

While it's never managed to rekindle the magic of its late '90s original run, Furby has made a handful of comebacks over the years. Hasbro bought the rights to the brand in 2003, and launched a new one two years later. Another attempt to reboot them was orchestrated in 2012, with a brand-new redesign helping it reassert itself as an electronic toy with a decent amount of selling power and brand recognition.

Information

Creator: David Hampton
First released: Autumn 1998
Expect to pay: £10-20

LTD.
tronics, Ltd.

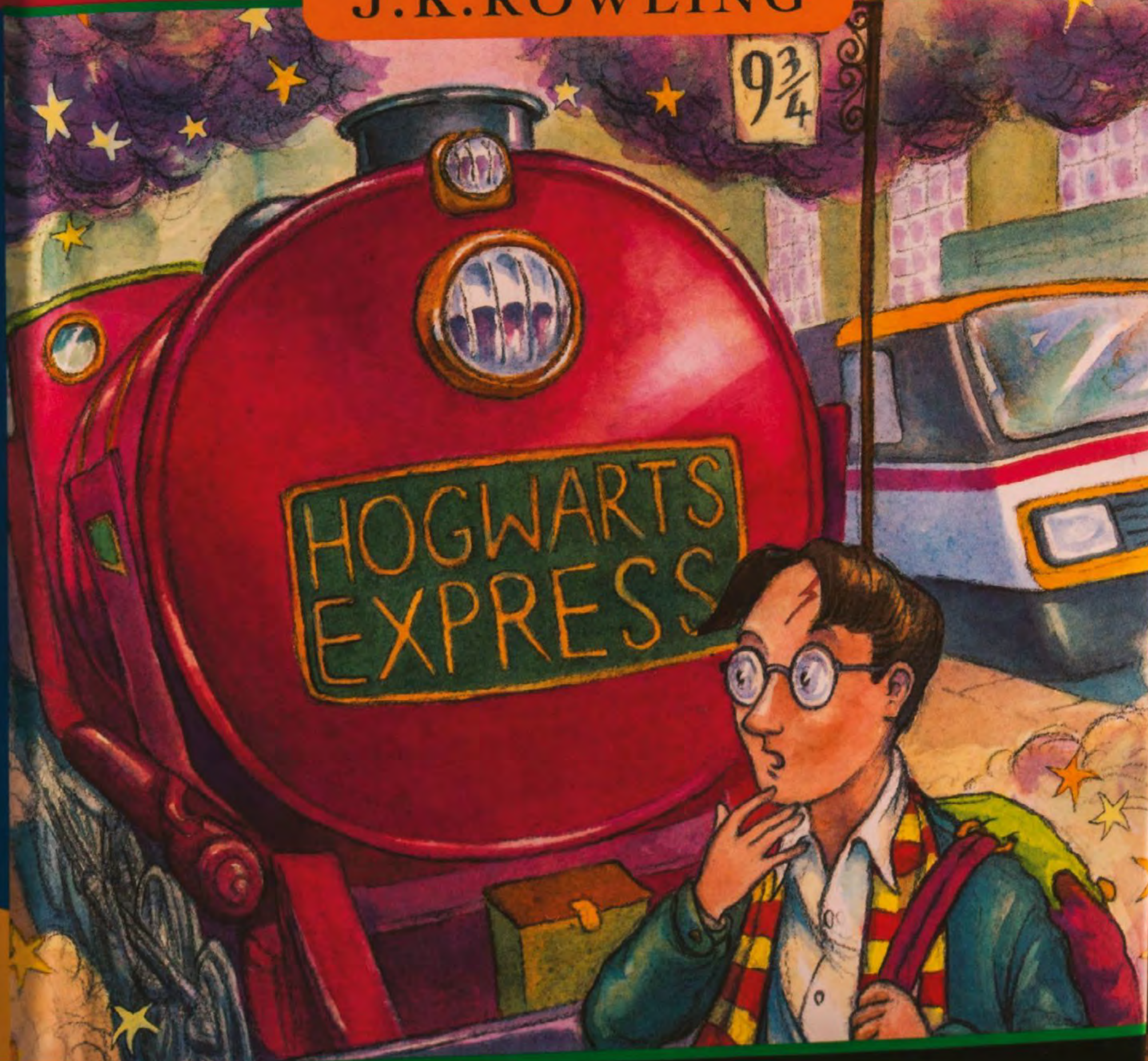
▼ The book was published under JK Rowling to keep the author's gender ambiguous. The editor at the time thought the book would appeal more to boys than girls and, as such, boys preferred books by male authors.

▼ The *Philosopher's Stone* was changed to *Sorcerer's Stone* for US audiences, although JK Rowling expressed regret at agreeing to this some years later.

HARRY POTTER

and the Philosopher's Stone

J.K. ROWLING



Information

TRIPLE SMARTIES GOLD AWARD WINNER

Publisher: Bloomsbury
First released: 26 June 1997
Expect to pay: £4.60

▼ JK Rowling would follow *The Philosopher's Stone* with two other *Harry Potter* books in the '90s, *The Chamber of Secrets* (1998) and *The Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999).

HARRY POTTER AND THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

Inspiration really can come from anywhere, and that was most certainly the case for Joanne Rowling. The idea for the 11-year-old wizard, Harry Potter, popped into her head while she was on a long train journey from Manchester to London.

She spent the next few years writing *Harry Potter and The Philosopher's Stone*, juggling the pressures of being a single mother, surviving off benefits and raising her daughter. Six years and 12 rejection letters later, the story of the young wizard and his first year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry became a reality.

This book introduced us to all our favourite characters – including Ron, Hermione,

Dumbledore and Hagrid – setting the stage for further adventures to follow. Inspiring adults and children alike, *Philosopher's Stone* is the first in a series of seven books. It has sold in excess of 120 million copies, making it one of the bestselling books of all time. Despite this, only around 500 copies were initially printed – with 300 of those going into libraries – making the hardback first editions incredibly valuable.

The *Harry Potter* books have since been translated into 79 languages, including Welsh, Latin and Ancient Greek. JK Rowling's work has gone on to inspire films, videogames, merchandise, theme parks and the creation of Quidditch as a real-life sport.

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone went on to win lots of awards, including Gold at the Nestlé Smarties Book Prize Awards, the British Book Awards' Children's book of the Year in 1997, and the FCBG Children's book award in 1997 (Longer Novel category).

The Legacy

Collectible first-edition, hardback copies of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* can be found with the dust jacket, but they are rare – one sold for just over £60,000 at a US auction in 2017.

In order to check whether you have a first edition, the publisher must be Bloomsbury, the latest date on the copyright page must be 1997, and the print line on the page must read: 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1. Check page 53 too: '1 wand' appears twice on the list of school supplies.

CAPTAIN PLANET AND THE PLANETEERS

Information

Manufacturer: DIC Entertainment
First Released: 1990
Expect to pay: £19.99
 (import DVD)

In an era of brightly coloured, super-sized heroes, it took something special to stand out. Captain Planet was unforgettable, his radiant design ensuring that he lingered in the memory long after the credits for each episode had finished rolling. With crystal blue skin, a green mullet, fiery red clothes and yellow globe burning bright like the sun on his chest, Captain Planet symbolised a healthy, vibrant Earth.

Captain Planet was the hero summoned by the Planeteers. The Planeteers are guardians chosen by Gaia, the spirit of Earth, who is woken from a century-long slumber by the dangerous levels of pollution

on the planet. The five Planeteers were drawn from all corners of the globe: Ghana, the US, Brazil, the Soviet Union and Asia. It gave Captain Planet an international flavour its fellow cartoons lacked, both in its day and even now.

With the antagonists calling themselves Eco-Villains, made up of members like Verminous Skumm and Dr Blight, *Captain Planet* featured an environmentally friendly message. Each episode found time during the action to explain problems facing nature and the environment, such as how burning coal leads to acid rain or how elephants are being hunted for ivory. Not every episode was grounded in reality – one plot saw Eco-Villains spreading a disease that turned people into rats – but the central message of protecting the Earth was always the same. From the striking look of its hero to the idea of different nations working together, there was a lot unique about *Captain Planet*, which is why it's still remembered so fondly today.

Most of the environmental issues are detailed through Wheeler's ignorance, as he needs Gaia to explain to him why the planet is being harmed by the actions of the Eco-Villains.

As the series progresses, however, Wheeler learns and becomes more knowledgeable.

Captain Planet occasionally veered away from environmental issues into more adult territory, especially for a children's cartoon. One episode focused on drug addiction while another addressed the AIDS pandemic, and the stigma that surrounds those who have it.

Gi is the Planeteer who wears the Water Ring and she's especially compassionate for marine life. It's never revealed exactly where she's from – she's just described as being from Asia in the cartoon – although the creators would later say Gi is from Malaysia.



The Legacy

Captain Planet has been absent from our screens for a while, but he's not completely forgotten. The Mother Nature Network, the biggest website in the world dedicated to sustainability, hosts episodes and unseen footage.





▲ The Gatekeeper remained one of the longest-running characters in the series, but plenty of other ghouls and creatures appeared on screen to guide (and usually terrify) would-be players. These included the witch, Anne de Chantraine; the voodoo zombie, Baron Samedi; and serial killer Elizabeth Bathory.

▲ Despite effectively requiring players to talk to their TV, Atmosfear proved a mega hit in 1991, and sold a staggering two million copies within two years. One of its sequels, 1995's *The Harbingers*, was also a big success, selling well above expectations in Australia, the UK and North America.

ATMOSFEAR

By the beginning of the '90s, board games were either a family game played on a lazy weekend or the imagined canvas for groups of bespectacled roleplayers. But then along came a game that changed all that, introducing not only a fresh injection of horror, but a new interactive element that no one had attempted before. This was Nightmare (or Atmosfear if you live in the United Kingdom or North America). The unusual yet instantly addictive

combination made it a smash hit, with its success peaking around 1993.

Later versions of the game would swap the video cassette for a DVD, but popping in that clumsy VHS and pausing/playing each section was all part of its charm at the time. With a board, pieces and cards, the aim would be to collect all the keystones before facing your worst fear. Looking back, the 'Gatekeeper' – who would host the event on the tape – was just a man in a hood with

some ominous music in the background, but at the time, it could be a real trip.

Originating from Australia, the game proved a huge success in its home region, and became a popular choice for both drink-addled dinner parties and late-night sessions for kids brave enough to face their fears. Playing like a twisted cross between Monopoly and Trivial Pursuit, Atmosfear became a unique experience few other board games have ever been able to emulate.

Information

Creators: Brett Clements and Phillip Tanner

First released: 1991

Expect to pay: £5-10

Atmosfear: The Gatekeeper (the 2004 reboot) was in development for nine years, and eventually went on to sell 600,000 copies worldwide, thanks mainly to its vastly overhauled playing board, new ruleset, enhanced DVD setup and better effects for the Gatekeeper itself. Its randomised programming made it much more enjoyable on repeat visits.



Actor David Whitney played the original Gatekeeper in the VHS version, with creators Brett Clements and Phillip Tanner using a mixture of creepy sound effects and visual effects (such as making the Gatekeeper's eyes glow or giving him a skull-like face) to help freak out players playing too close to the TV.

The Legacy

The original version of Atmosfear/Nightmare came boxed with a VHS tape, but an updated version with a DVD was released in 2004 – known as Atmosfear: The Gatekeeper – making the experience far more interactive and dynamic (the titular Gatekeeper also looked a lot scarier). It spawned plenty of sequels and expansions over the years as well, including Nightmare II-IV, The Harbingers and Khufu the Mummy. Of all the later versions, the revamped 2004 version proved the most popular and memorable to a new generation of players.

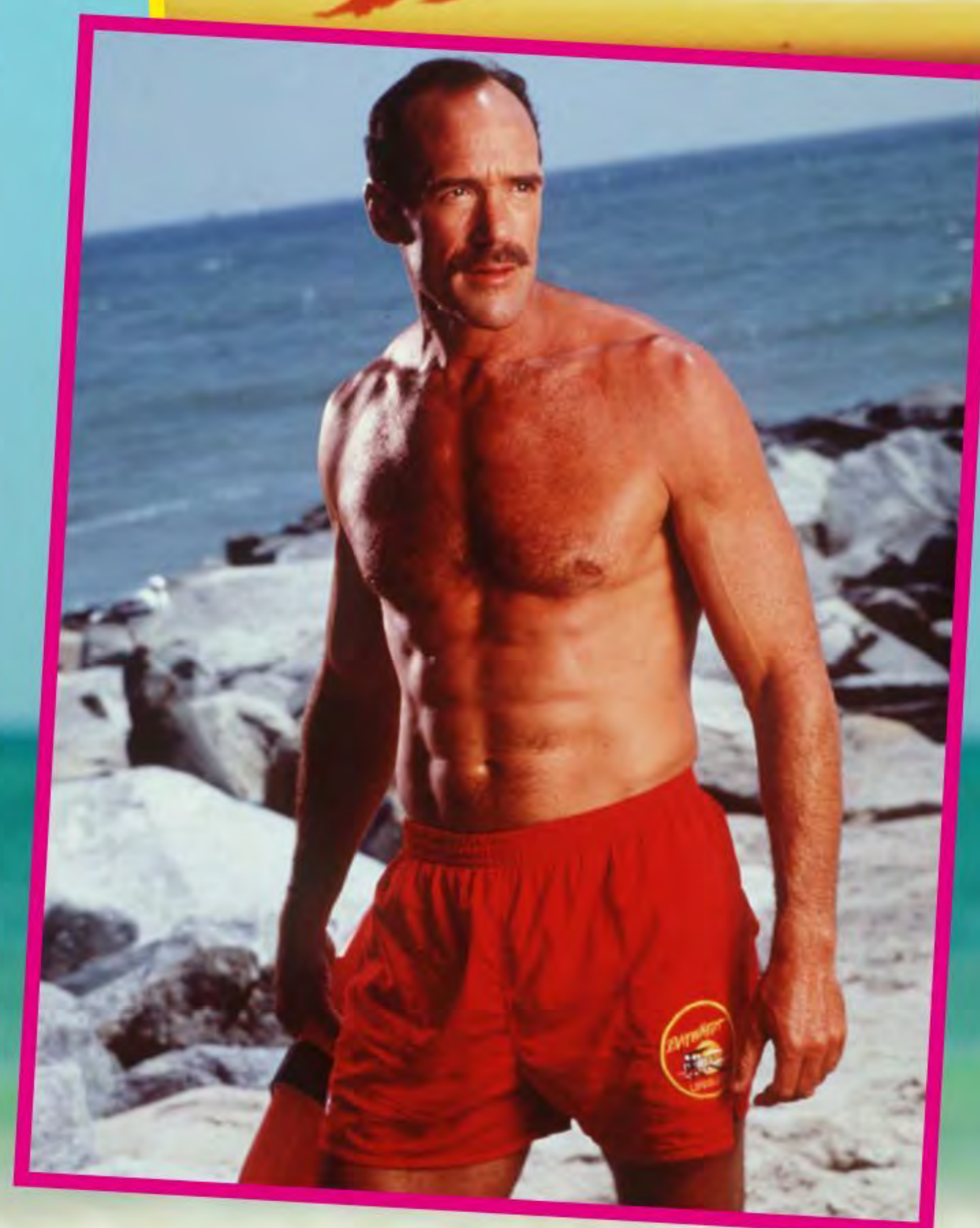
BAYWATCH

On paper, a show about lifeguards looking after beachgoers on the sands of California shouldn't have been a success, and it very nearly wasn't. *Baywatch* actually premiered on US TV at the very end of the '80s, and did so poorly in the ratings that it was cancelled after a single season and put production company GTG out of business to boot. *Baywatch*, it seemed, wasn't destined for success.

However, the show proved a popular hit in Europe, and with *Knight Rider* star David Hasselhoff and creators Michael Berk, Douglas Schwartz and Gregory J Bonann dedicated to getting the show a second chance, they bought back the rights to the show for just \$10. And what

an investment it was. With new star and former Playboy playmate Pamela Anderson on board, *Baywatch* went from forgettable procedural drama to international superhit. With its tanned bodies, sun-kissed beaches and slo-mo beach running, *Baywatch* transformed into a cultural phenomenon.

It was a ratings beast and helped revive the career of Hasselhoff, but it also encountered its fair share of problems. Years after surviving cancellation, *Baywatch* hit the news when a sex tape involving Anderson and then-husband, the Mötley Crüe's Tommy Lee went public. There was an outcry among distributors in the States and around the world, but rather than sinking the show's success, it drove ratings into the stratosphere, and cemented *Baywatch* as one of the decade's biggest TV brands.



Mustachioed cast member Michael Newman was a lifeguard in real life when the producers of the show hired him to play the role. He would often coach the other stars on how to pull off certain dives, and was able to do plenty of his own stunts. His character was even named Michael Newman.

Baywatch had a big-screen reboot in 2017, with Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson and Zac Efron headlining an attempt to turn the once-powerful brand into a cinematic franchise. It exchanged the corny melodrama for comedy, and ultimately proved itself to be a flop with an 18 per cent Rotten Tomatoes rating.

Information

Creators: Michael Berk, Douglas Schwartz and Gregory J Bonann

First broadcast: 22 September 1989

Number of episodes: 242





The Legacy

Baywatch ran from 1989 to 1999 before a drop in ratings led the producers to attempt to rebrand the show with a new location and cast. It was originally meant to be set in Australia with the title *Baywatch Down Under*, but strong local resistance to the idea led the producers to opt to move the show to Hawaii instead. The deal secured two more seasons for the show, but it eventually bowed out in 2001.

▲ In order to convince studio executives to give the concept of *Baywatch* a chance, its creators created a custom music video to sell the idea. They spliced together footage of lifeguards working on sun-kissed beaches, and edited to Don Henley's iconic track *The Boys of Summer*.

▲ During the height of its success, creators Michael Berk, Gregory J Bonann and Douglas Schwartz teamed up with David Hasselhoff to create a spin-off series called *Baywatch Nights*. Its first series followed a detective agency, while its second followed a paranormal route. Unsurprisingly, it didn't get a third season.





THE GOLDEN AGE OF GAMING

How the greatest systems in gaming history conquered the world, broke new ground and captured our hearts

The '90s was arguably the most important era in videogame history. The fierce battle for console supremacy between Nintendo's SNES and Sega's Mega Drive kicked the decade off, the rivalry taking the world by storm as kids across the globe went to bat for their favourite system, and the companies' mascots, Mario and Sonic, became household names. That rivalry fuelled the creation of countless 16-bit classics – games like *Super Mario World*, *Sonic the Hedgehog 2*, *Golden Axe*, *Super Mario Kart*, *Streets of Rage II* and *Super Metroid*.

It wasn't just Nintendo and Sega churning out great games. Other developers were creating some of the most influential titles of all time. We're talking about the most important fighting game in the genre's history: *Street Fighter II*, FPS juggernauts *Doom* and *Half-Life*, RPG mega-hits like *Final Fantasy VII* and *Pokémon Red* and *Blue*, and multiplayer innovators like *GoldenEye 007*.

Speaking of innovation, the '90s was the decade that quite literally added a new dimension to gaming. With the coming of Sony's PlayStation and the Nintendo 64 in the

mid-'90s, 3D gaming exploded, changing the medium forever. *Mario 64* and *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* brought 2D icons into the new age on Nintendo's system, while the PlayStation gave us ground-breaking new titles like stealth-action game *Metal Gear Solid* and survival horror *Resident Evil*.

This was a decade where the old met the new, and those there were lucky enough to experience the best of both: the peak of the 2D era on 16-bit systems and the revolutionary first steps into the exciting new frontier of 3D. This truly was gaming's golden age.

GAME BOY

The Game Boy was far more basic than handheld competitors like Sega's Game Gear and the Atari Lynx. It only had two buttons to complement its d-pad and a single-colour screen, as opposed to the vibrant colour offered by its rivals. However, its simplicity worked in its favour, the console's accessibility broadening its audience, and the simple screen giving it an incredible battery life that smashed the pitiful efforts of its foes.

This helped make the Game Boy a huge success. It enjoyed strong sales right out the gate, and had an unusually long lifespan. It was still going strong in the late '90s when the release of the Game Boy Color in 1998 and the first entry in one of the most successful videogame franchises of all-time in *Pokémon*

Red and Blue gave the console a boost that saw it end the decade as it started it: on a high.

The Game Boy's success wasn't just down to Nintendo's smart choices on the console's hardware. There was also its 'killer app': a little game called *Tetris*. The famous block-puzzler's beautiful simplicity reflected the ethos of the hardware it was played on and, together, the two became a phenomenon. Almost everyone knows *Tetris*, as well as the iconic piece of hardware that made it a worldwide hit.

In the age of smartphones, it's difficult to remember that handheld gaming wasn't always such a matter-of-fact occurrence. It was this pioneer that popularised the concept of taking games on the go, and that makes it an important part of videogame history.

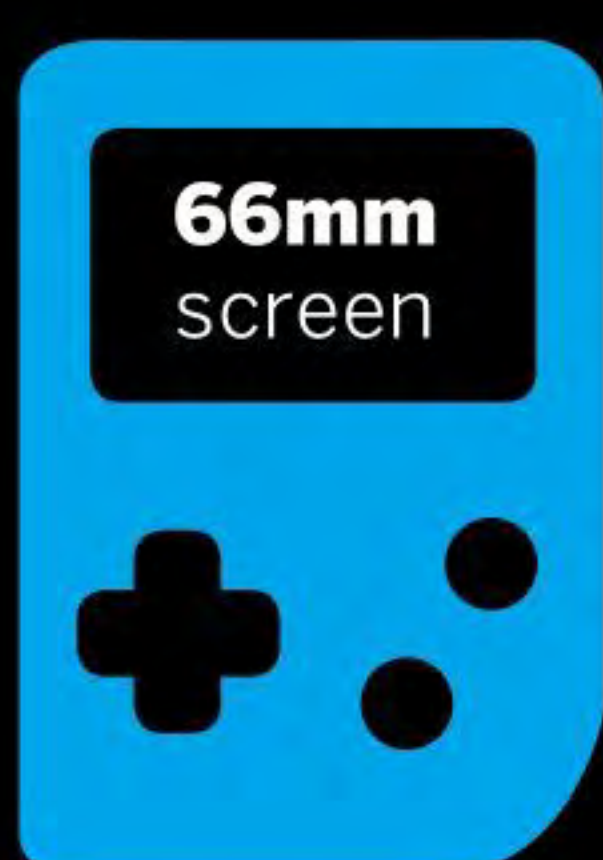
The Game Boy in numbers

118.98
million
units sold

30 hour
battery
life



66mm
screen



TECH SPECS

RAM: 8kB

Processor: 8-bit Sharp LR35902 at 4.19MHz

Audio: 2 pulse wave generators, 1PCM 4-bit wave sample, 1 noise generator

Resolution: 160 x 144 pixels

Media: Cartridges

Graphics: 8kB video RAM



Information

Manufacturer: Nintendo

Year: 1990

Expect to pay: £69.99 (launch), £20-50 (today)

GAME BOY PERFECT TEN GAMES

There's a worrying number of licensed platformers on Nintendo's handheld, but also a lot of genuine gems. If you're thinking of buying a machine or adding to an existing collection, make sure you at least own the following



01

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: LINK'S AWAKENING

- » RELEASED: 1993
- » PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
- » CREATED BY: NINTENDO
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: F-ZERO

01 Although it features an ending that's the Linkian equivalent of finding Bobby Ewing in the shower, this charming adventure remains one of the Game Boy's best titles. Set on the island of Koholint, *Link's Awakening* has the intrepid adventurer trying to awaken the mystical Wind Fish. His trials take him through some fantastically designed dungeons, see him battling some impressive bosses and generally meandering around a beautifully detailed world. The lack of certain *Zelda* elements – it's not set in Hyrule and Ganon is nowhere to be seen – may upset some, but you'll be doing yourself a grave disservice if you turn your nose up at Link's first portable adventure. A true classic.

BILL & TED'S EXCELLENT GAME BOY ADVENTURE

- » RELEASED: 1991
- » PUBLISHER: LIN
- » CREATED BY: BEAM SOFTWARE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: TRANSFORMERS: ARMADA

02 Licensed platformers are often nothing more than a cheap cash-in at the expense of whichever movie they're based upon. Nobody passed this information on to Beam Software though, for which we're eternally grateful. Playing like a Nineties update of *Chuckie Egg*, *BATEGBA* is quite frankly fantastic fun and should be sought out by anyone with a love of platformers. Yes it looks incredibly basic, but the cunning level design, incredibly tight controls and overall slickness more than make up for its graphical shortcomings. Perfect proof that you don't have to be Nintendo or rely on well-known videogame stars in order to make a genuinely excellent (sorry) portable platformer.



02

R-TYPE

- » RELEASED: 1991
- » PUBLISHER: IREM
- » CREATED BY: BITS STUDIOS
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: LAST ACTION HERO

03 Although superseded by the incredibly polished *R-Type DX*, this remains the best blaster on the Game Boy. An astonishingly polished port, *R-Type* looks and sounds amazing due to its accurately drawn sprites – right down to a near perfect miniaturised version of Dobkeratops – and impressively authentic music, and plays like a proverbial dream. Yes it's just as annoyingly tough as its arcade parent, but the stunning level design, exceptionally constructed bosses and addictive gameplay will keep bringing you back for more. It's one of the best arcade ports the Game Boy ever had and is a must for shoot-'em-up fans everywhere.

SUPER MARIO LAND

- » RELEASED: 1989
- » PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
- » CREATED BY: NINTENDO
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: DONKEY KONG

04 Its successors certainly boasted far more spit and polish, but in terms of fantastic gameplay hardly anything else on the Game Boy comes close to Mario's first handheld outing. Bowser has been replaced by the sinister-sounding Tatanga while Luigi and Princess Peach are nowhere to be seen, but don't let that put you off as *Super Mario Land* is as good as anything that appeared on Nintendo's home systems thanks to its cleverly designed levels, perfect controls and polished gameplay. Mario even finds time to jump into a sub and plane for some fun shmup action. A superb platformer that sold 18 million copies.

POKÉMON RED/BLUE

- » RELEASED: 1996
- » PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
- » CREATED BY: GAME FREAK
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: MARIO & WARIO

05 By the time UK gamers were able to sample the delights of Game Freak's ridiculously absorbing RPG, both *Pokémon Red* and *Blue* had been available in Japan for three years! The lengthy wait was well worth it, however, and while the series has since gone on to become a global merchandising phenomenon, it's important to remember that Game Freak's first two games were as captivating as they were original. Full of charm and recapturing the trading card craze that used to sweep schools, it took a serious amount of patience and strategy in order to capture all 151 of Game Freak's cute critters.



03



04



05



METROID II: THE RETURN OF SAMUS

- » RELEASED: 1992
- » PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
- » CREATED BY: INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: ADVANCE WARS

06 Samus's second outing is generally considered to be one of her worst, but we'd have to disagree. Sure the graphics take a hit on the Game Boy's tiny screen, and the environments are bland as hell, but it's the gameplay that matters and *The Return Of Samus* delivers in spades. Huge and sprawling, it rewards exploration and expands on the gameplay that made the original *Metroid* so enjoyable. Add in some impressive boss fights and a more refined Samus who's far easier to control than her NES counterpart and the result is a wonderful adventure that just keeps on giving.

CASTLEVANIA II: BELMONT'S REVENGE

- » RELEASED: 1991
- » PUBLISHER: KONAMI
- » CREATED BY: KONAMI
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: MYSTICAL NINJA

09 If the only Game Boy *Castlevania* you've ever played is the godawful original, then don't be put off by this sequel. Realising what a hash it had made with the series' first portable debut, Konami went back to the drawing board, meaning that *Belmont's Revenge* is not only worthy of the franchise but easily one of the best examples of the genre to be found on the Game Boy. Although there are only four levels, they're extremely large in size, brilliantly designed and feature a range of familiar enemies and bosses. Audio is also impressive, easily matching the excellent tunes that appeared in the NES games. In short, an essential addition to your Game Boy library.



TETRIS

- » RELEASED: 1989
- » PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
- » CREATED BY: BULLETPROOF SOFTWARE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: YOSH'S COOKIE

07 With Nintendo now being hailed as the saviours of gaming due to the Wii, DS and Switch ensnaring brand-new gamers, it's easy to forget that it managed to do exactly the same thing with the Game Boy and *Tetris*. Everyone from your best mate to your granny was playing Alexei Pajitnov's classic puzzler back in 1989, no doubt helped by the fact that it was bundled with the Game Boy. Worryingly addictive and sporting that 'one more go' factor, it was a true killer app for the machine and proved that you didn't need flashy graphics or even colour to captivate the masses. Just a damned good game.

FACEBALL 2000

- » RELEASED: 1991
- » PUBLISHER: BULLETPROOF SOFTWARE
- » CREATED BY: XANTH SOFTWARE F/X
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: GATO

08 What do you get when you cross forum emoticons with *Doom*? This gem of a first-person shooter still looks astonishing on the Game Boy's tiny screen, despite its slow pace. A port of the Atari ST's *Midi Maze*, *Faceball 2000* can support death matches for up to 16 players. The solo mode is effectively a take on *3D Monster Maze* where you have to guide your HAPPYFACE (Holographically Assisted Physical Pattern Yielded For Active Computerised Embarkation) through 70 complex mazes, but it's the multiplayer where *Faceball 2000* truly shines. Of course finding 15 other players may be a little tricky now...



KIRBY'S PINBALL LAND

- » RELEASED: 1993
- » PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
- » CREATED BY: HAL LABORATORY
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: ADVENTURES OF LOLO

10 We came oh so close to nominating the excellent *Revenge Of The Gator* here – also by HAL Laboratory – but *Kirby* is just the better pinball game. Featuring superior physics, a total of three different tables to battle on – each with its own mini-game – and some extremely lush looking visuals, *Kirby's Pinball Land* is a great little title that will bring out the score-attack fiend in everyone. The lack of a multiplayer mode is a little annoying, but this has been put together with so much care and attention that it's impossible not to love. Worryingly addictive and likely to give you extremely sore thumbs, it's another essential game that your Game Boy shouldn't be without.



MEGA DRIVE

The Mega Drive was a powerhouse at the time of its release. It had a separate processor to handle its audio, freeing up the main processor to work with the video processor, and a palette of 512 colours to push big sprites in vibrant scenes. Using those tools, the system offered incredible graphics that had never been seen in the home before, delivering an impressive library of arcade ports such as *Golden Axe* and *Altered Beast*.

The system also enjoyed strong support from third-party publishers, most notably the first entries in EA's juggernaut sports series, *FIFA* and *Madden*, the latter of which was important in helping the console gain traction in the US, where it was known as the Genesis.

The series most strongly associated with the system, however, is *Sonic the Hedgehog*. The first two *Sonic* games were a big hit, playing a vital role in making the Mega Drive a success. The speedy platformers' star, Sonic, also served as a mascot for Sega, his attitude contrasting with the more genial Mario as part of a strategy to position the Mega Drive as the cool console for teenagers, and its rival, the SNES, as a kids' toy.

Sega made several mistakes with the Mega Drive as the '90s rolled on, most infamously with its two ill-fated Mega Drive add-ons, the Sega 32X and the Sega CD. But that hasn't stopped the Mega Drive going down in history as one of the greatest consoles of all time.

Information

Manufacturer: Sega

Year: 1990

Expect to pay: £189.99 (launch), £30-80 (today)

The Mega Drive in numbers

30.75 million units sold worldwide

6 button controller

Original system measures:

28 x 21.2 x 7cm

MEGA DRIVE

TECH SPECS

RAM: 72kB

Processor: Motorola 68000 at 7.6MHz and Zilog z80

Audio: Yamaha YM2612 FM Synthesizer and Texas Instruments SN76489 PSG

Resolution: 320 x 240 pixels

Media: ROM Cartridges

Graphics: Sega VDP





MEGA DRIVE PERFECT TEN GAMES

Sega's successful console is home to dozens of great titles, but here are ten of the very best from this classic 16-bit machine from the '90s.



01

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2

- » RELEASED: 1992
- » PUBLISHED BY: SEGA
- » CREATED BY: SONIC TEAM
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

01 After the success of the original *Sonic The Hedgehog*, it came as no surprise to see the lovable scamp returning a year later in a brand-new adventure. With a refined engine, the addition of Miles "Tails" Prowler, a greatly enhanced bonus stage and an excellent two-player mode, *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* is easily one of the hedgehog's most memorable 16-bit outings. While the core gameplay is little different to that seen in the original, Sonic Team threw in plenty of new touches to ensure that gamers wouldn't feel short-changed. The end result is not only one of the Mega Drive's greatest platformers, but quite possibly the hedgehog's finest hours on any system.

GUNSTAR HEROES

- » RELEASED: 1993
- » PUBLISHED BY: SEGA
- » CREATED BY: TREASURE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: DYNAMITE HEADDY

02 Outrageously good platformer/shooter that features dazzling graphics, a crazy relentless pace and dozens of fantastic boss encounters. Created by a bunch of ex Konami staffers (you should all know the story by now) *Gunstar Heroes* does tricks with the Mega Drive's hardware that many thought impossible, and even today it has a freshness about it. While special mention must obviously go to the game's astounding visuals, Treasure also ensured that the gameplay was just as special and injected all manner of interesting play mechanics to ensure that every level remains as fresh as a proverbial daisy. If you're after a frenetic blaster then look no further. This is run-'n-gun heaven.



02

DEVIL CRASH

- » RELEASED: 1991
- » PUBLISHED BY: TECHNO SOFT
- » CREATED BY: IN-HOUSE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: THUNDER FORCE III

03 There's a few pinball games on Sega's Mega Drive but this superb 1991 offering from Techno Soft remains a firm favourite. While it only features one main table, it's well designed and boasts all manner of different bonuses that lead you to several smaller, mini-tables. While Techno Soft's previous pinball title *Alien Crush* featured an alien theme, *Devil Crash* has chortling knights, chanting monks and dragons occupying its tables. Released in the UK as *Dragon's Fury*, *Devil Crash* is a superb pinball game that should last you forever. Oh, and it's got one of the most rocking soundtracks we've ever heard.

STREETS OF RAGE 2

- » RELEASED: 1993
- » PUBLISHED BY: SEGA
- » CREATED BY: IN-HOUSE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: STREETS OF RAGE

04 As with *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*, Sega took everything that made the original *Streets Of Rage* so fun to play and turned it up to 11. The visuals have had an overhaul with all the heroes and enemies being beefed up and boasting greatly improved detail. Yuzo Koshiro is back with another thumping soundtrack and the game's many bosses are tougher than ever. Each character now has a selection of special moves and there are four different protagonists to choose from: Axel and Blaze from the original game and new boys Skate and Max. A magnificent scrolling fighter that's crying out for a next-gen remake.

STRIDER

- » RELEASED: 1991
- » PUBLISHED BY: SEGA
- » CREATED BY: IN-HOUSE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: AFTER BURNER

05 Oh come on, how could we put together a Mega Drive top ten and not feature *Strider*? Despite our obsessive love for Capcom's purple clad ninja *Strider's* addition is easily justified, as it's quite simply the strongest arcade port on Sega's 16-bit console. Not only does it capture all the character of the coin-op classic, it goes one step further and delivers a stunning soundtrack that actually manages to improve on the arcade original. Sure there's a fair amount of flickering here and there but as far as capturing the essence of the original game goes no other Mega Drive conversion comes close. Essential.



03



04



05



06

DESERT STRIKE: RETURN TO THE GULF

- » RELEASED: 1992
- » PUBLISHED BY: ELECTRONIC ARTS
- » CREATED BY: IN-HOUSE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: JUNGLE STRIKE

06 Set a year after the events in the Gulf War, *Desert Strike* sees you climbing into an Apache and using it to stop a despot in the Middle East from starting World War III. Utilising an isometric viewpoint, EA's blaster saw you storming into armed bases to rescue POWs, whilst using your firepower to take out anything that stood in your way. Despite the destruction you can cause, *Desert Strike* is quite a cerebral affair, with many of the later levels requiring a fair amount of strategy to complete. The thinking man's shoot-'em-up.



07

SHINOBI III: RETURN OF THE NINJA MASTER

- » RELEASED: 1993
- » PUBLISHED BY: SEGA
- » CREATED BY: IN-HOUSE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: THE REVENGE OF SHINOBI

07 Despite a lengthy development period, *Shinobi III*'s four-year wait was worth it. Not only has the pace been increased, your ninja now knows a selection of new skills. Flying-kicks, a running dash and using your hands to swing across ceilings are just a few of the new abilities you can use and all have been perfectly integrated into the game. There are even sections where you can ride horses or surf along the crest of a wave, dispensing bad guys as you go. If only the later games showed a tenth of the imagination of *Shinobi III*...



08

ECCO THE DOLPHIN

- » RELEASED: 1993
- » PUBLISHED BY: SEGA
- » CREATED BY: NOVOTRADE INTERNATIONAL
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: JAWS UNLEASHED

08 Delightful underwater adventure that sees you trying to rescue your dolphin friends when they all get sucked up by a mysterious hurricane. With its focus on exploring the expansive stages and its many devious puzzles, *Ecco The Dolphin* was quite unlike any other game at the time and instantly caught the public's attention. The underwater environments are full of detail and bursting with all sorts of exotic undersea creatures. Our only real complaints with Ecco is that some of the sections can be difficult to negotiate, ruining the otherwise tranquil atmosphere.



09

THUNDER FORCE IV

- » RELEASED: 1993
- » PUBLISHED BY: SEGA
- » CREATED BY: TECHNO SOFT
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: ALIEN CRUSH

09 While *Thunder Force III* was never released in the UK, Sega atoned by releasing its superb sequel in 1993. Techno Soft's fourth *Thunder Force* title (and the third to appear on the Mega Drive) boasted amazing visuals, over-the-top weaponry and a stunning soundtrack that perfectly complemented the frenetic on-screen action. As with *Thunder Force III*, the first four levels could be approached in any order, but the stages themselves were far larger in scope and featured both vertical and horizontal sections. Throw in some insanely tough bosses, plenty of exotic locations and those stunning visuals and you have one of the Mega Drive's classiest shooters.

SHINING FORCE II

- » RELEASED: 1994
- » PUBLISHED BY: SEGA
- » CREATED BY: IN-HOUSE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: SHINING FORCE

10 While it essentially features the same combat system and gameplay mechanics as the original *Shining Force*, Sega's sequel is generally considered by many to be a far superior RPG. Take the combat for example: it's a lot quicker now, making fights far less of a chore than before, and the new counter-attacks add a great degree of spice to the proceedings. The interaction of items is also better integrated with little touches like automatically passing a picked up item to another character when your main hero's pockets are full, and being able to view an item's stats before you buy them means that everything flows along rather nicely. A superb RPG that shouldn't be missed under any circumstances.



10

TECH SPECS

RAM: 128kB

Processor: Custom 65C816
at 3.58 MHz

Audio: 8-channel ADPCM

Resolution: 256 x 224 – 512 x
448 pixels

Media: Cartridges

Graphics: 16-bit PPU with
64kB RAM



SNES

Released in Japan two years after its main competitor, the Mega Drive, the SNES impressed with its more advanced graphical and sound capabilities (though the Mega Drive remained competitive on the speed front). For example, while the Mega Drive could display 61 colours from a possible 512 on screen at any given time, the SNES could display a whopping 256 from a possible 32,768. Add to that the SNES's pseudo-3D capabilities, shown off by titles like *F-Zero* and *Pilotwings*, and

there's no denying that it had the edge technically speaking.

However, to understand what made the SNES such a huge hit and, to this day, one of the most-loved consoles ever released, you need look no further than the games that were released for it. The console helped to cement the legacy of the iconic Mario with *Super Mario World* – to this day heralded by many as not only the greatest platformer of all time, but the greatest game full stop. There was the fantastic kart-racer *Super Mario Kart*,

the genre-defining *Super Metroid*, and legendary RPGs like *Chrono Trigger*, *Final Fantasy VI* and *Earthbound*. Not content with popularising one iconic character with some of gaming's most definitive titles, à la Mario, the SNES also gave us *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*, *Donkey Kong Country* and *Star Fox*.

So, yes, the console was powerful, but it was that incredible library of games that blended creative innovation with a supreme level of quality that really made it a success.

Information

Manufacturer: Nintendo

Year: 1992

Expect to pay: £150
(launch), £50-100 (today)

"To understand what made the SNES one of the most-loved consoles ever released, look no further than the games that were released for it"



The SNES in numbers

49.10
million
units sold

20.60 MILLION
copies of
Super Mario
World sold



Launched with only
3 games in
Japan



SNES PERFECT TEN GAMES

This has been one of the hardest top tens to put together, a fitting tribute to the fact that Nintendo's SNES had a phenomenal amount of great games available for it. Join us as we run down the best games for arguably the greatest console of the '90s.



01



02



03



04

SUPER MARIO KART

- » RELEASED: 1993
- » PUBLISHED BY: NINTENDO
- » CREATED BY: NINTENDO
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: SUPER MARIO BROS

01 We've been playing the original *Super Mario Kart* on and off now for over 25 years and it still remains fresher than a baker's dozen that's just popped out the oven. Meticulously designed circuits, a well-balanced range of weapons – including the greatly missed feather – and impressive visuals proved perfectly that there was so much more to everyone's favourite plumber than simply jumping on wayward Koopas. While the cups provided plenty of fun, it was the stunning time trial mode and sublime multi-player games that kept us constantly going back for just one more go. Those who missed out first time around can now experience it on the SNES Mini, released in 2017.

SUPER METROID

- » RELEASED: 1994
- » PUBLISHED BY: NINTENDO
- » CREATED BY: INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: BADVANCE WARS DS

02 *Super Metroid* is a game that works on a variety of levels. While some marvelled at its motherly themes, stunningly created environments and remarkable attention to detail, others were simply impressed with the sheer amount of crap you could blow up in it. Regardless of how you feel about Samus's only 16-bit adventure, there's no denying that *Super Metroid* remains a staggering achievement that perfectly combines the rush of shooting huge bosses with the wonder of exploring vast new areas like no other SNES game around. Little wonder then that it took Nintendo eight years to come up with a sequel that could do it justice.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST

- » RELEASED: 1992
- » PUBLISHED BY: NINTENDO
- » CREATED BY: NINTENDO
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE OCARINA OF TIME

03 There's no denying the superiority of *Ocarina of Time*, but *A Link To The Past* remains a wonderfully accomplished adventure that deserves to sit proudly in every SNES owner's collection. Every dungeon you explore is crafted to perfection, and while they start off easy, you'll soon be scratching your head over Miyamoto's deviously designed puzzles. The many weapons you discover are well balanced and every encountered boss is a masterstroke in design. Then of course you have the two unique worlds that Link can eventually switch between, thus making an already sprawling game even larger. Quite simply one of the finest 16-bit adventures ever made.

CONTRA III: THE ALIEN WARS

- » RELEASED: 1992
- » PUBLISHED BY: KONAMI
- » CREATED BY: KONAMI
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV

04 Konami released some outstanding titles for Nintendo's 16-bit wonder, but this cracking effort from 1992 is arguably one of its best efforts. Each level is a rollercoaster ride of destruction and featured the SNES hardware on fine form. Sprites are full of detail, the game's many bosses a joy to behold, and there's a ridiculous amount of Mode 7 trickery going on. Add in a fantastic, stomping soundtrack, an awesome array of different weapons and some groovy overhead levels (that can be rotated with the left and right triggers) and you have a run-'n'-gun title that would be essential on any format.

AXELAY

- » RELEASED: 1993
- » PUBLISHED BY: KONAMI
- » CREATED BY: KONAMI
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: GRADIUS III

05 There's a host of great shooters available for the SNES, but few can compare to the brilliance that is Konami's stunning *Axelay*. From its quasi-3D levels to its utterly amazing music, every moment of *Axelay* is exhilarating to play through. While the level design and available weapons are worthy of praise, it's the immense, striking bosses the game constantly throws at you that truly astound. Huge metallic spiders, colossal ED-209 styled mechs and a gigantic lava creature are just a few of the mayors you have to deal with and each is breath-taking to behold. Why it was never released on the Game Boy Advance we'll never know...



05



06



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08



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10

SUPER MARIO ALL-STARS

- » RELEASED: 1993
- » PUBLISHED BY: NINTENDO
- » CREATED BY: NINTENDO
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE

06 What's better than three classic Mario NES outings on one cartridge? Why, three Mario NES games with improved aesthetics and a fourth exclusive title that had only originally appeared in Japan of course! *All-Stars'* triple whammy of *Super Mario Bros 1, 2 and 3* made it incredible value for money and were great examples of taking old games and updating them for a newer platform. Add in *Super Mario Bros: The Lost Levels*, which was effectively a tougher version of the original game and allowed you to choose from either brother and you had an amazingly comprehensive package. Finally, if you bought the version that came boxed with a SNES you received *Super Mario World* on the cartridge. Bargain!

CHRONO TRIGGER

- » RELEASED: 1995
- » PUBLISHED BY: SQUARESOFT
- » CREATED BY: SQUARESOFT
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: FINAL FANTASY X

07 It would have been all too easy to go with Squaresoft's *Secret Of Mana*, so we've decided to focus on this little beauty instead. While Squaresoft's epic RPG borrows plenty of ideas from the *Final Fantasy* series, you just can't help but be impressed by the sheer amount of love that has gone into crafting this astonishing RPG. Although the central storyline is fairly predictable, it soon begins to twist and turn all over the place and introduces plenty of memorable characters and sub plots. The combat system is a joy to use and the use of sound throughout is outstanding. It all combines to create one of the most engrossing RPGs we've ever played. Utterly essential.

STREET FIGHTER ALPHA II

- » RELEASED: 1996
- » PUBLISHED BY: CAPCOM
- » CREATED BY: CAPCOM
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: SUPER GHOULS 'N GHOSTS

08 Capcom's second *Alpha* title was released late in the SNES's life, and as a result, was sadly overlooked by a great many gamers who had moved on to the newer, flashier consoles. Their loss was our gain however, as it's easily one of the best brawlers on Nintendo's 16-bit wonder. Great looking sprites, a solid roster of characters, new moves, plenty of additional animation and thumping good gameplay made *Alpha II* a winner. We've no idea why the first game didn't appear on the SNES, but Capcom more than made up for it with this excellent sequel. An outstanding fighter that deserves to be in everyone's SNES collection.

PILOTWINGS

- » RELEASED: 1993
- » PUBLISHED BY: NINTENDO
- » CREATED BY: NINTENDO
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: DONKEY KONG

09 The Mode 7 chip was used in countless numbers of SNES games, but never was its appearance more noticeable than in the wondrous *Pilotwings*. Taking control of a budding pilot, all the game required you to do was master licences for four different events: Skydiving, Rocketbelt, Light Plane and Hang Glider. While some of *Pilotwings'* events could be tricky to get to grips with, the elation you felt when they were finally mastered more than made up for it. Thanks to the excellent Mode 7 effects the sense of scale you encountered as you flew through the air was breathtaking, and wait until you finally get to use the hang glider... Marvellous.

UMIHARA KAWASE

- » RELEASED: 1994
- » PUBLISHED BY: NHK
- » CREATED BY: TNIN
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: SHIJOU SAIKYOU LEAGUE SERIE A: ACE STRIKER

10 It seems only fair to put at least one quirky Japanese title in the top ten, so our vote goes to the delightful *UmiHara Kawase*. Taking control of an adorably cute little girl, the aim of each stage is simple – avoid the bizarre fishy enemies and reach the door on each exit. Of course, said exit is often out of reach, and with your little tyke not being that great a jumper she has to rely on a handy elastic rope to get her around. Think *Bionic Commando* but with some decent rope physics thrown into the mix and you have a good idea of what to expect.

NINTENDO 64

Go back to the early days of 3D gaming and you can find plenty of titles that have aged badly. That's not true when it comes to the Nintendo 64's key games, and that's evidence of the fact that it laid down the template for how to do 3D right. After defining 2D platforming with its mascot, Mario, Nintendo did the same for 3D platforming with *Super Mario 64*. The game featured a ground-breaking open approach that let you explore Bowser's Castle at will, a revolutionary dynamic camera system, and amazingly precise movement, setting new standards for

3D gaming. That wasn't the only influential title on the console either: *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*'s lock-on system has become an action-game staple, and *GoldenEye 007*'s thrilling multiplayer matches popularised not only the console itself, but the now ubiquitous console FPS.

Let's not forget just how influential the hardware was either, in particular the N64 controller. The reason that games like *Super Mario 64* felt so fluid was in part because of the controller's analogue stick, now considered essential for a modern controller. There

was also the release of the Rumble Pak, an add-on to provide haptic feedback to the controller. Again, rumble features have become standard on modern consoles.

The trailblazing steps taken by Nintendo in developing the N64's hardware and its flagship games has had a huge influence on modern gaming. That's a testament to how important this console is and what made it so great.

Information

Manufacturer: Nintendo

Year: 1995

Expect to pay: £250
(launch), £50 (today)



The N64 in numbers

32.93
million
units sold

RAM expandable to
8MB
with Expansion Pak

4 controller
slots

TECH
SPECS

RAM: 4MB
Processor: NEC VR4300
Audio: 64-bit DSP
Resolution: 320 x 240 –
640 x 480 pixels
Media: Cartridges
Graphics: Reality
Coprocesor



"The reason that games like Super Mario 64 felt so fluid was in part because of the controller's analogue stick, now essential for a modern controller"

N64 PERFECT TEN GAMES

Nintendo followed the success of the SNES with the world's first 64-bit machine, which featured some of the best 3D games ever created for a home console. Here are ten of the N64's standout releases.



01

GOLDENEYE

- » RELEASED: 1997
- » DEVELOPED BY: RARE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: SABRE WULF

01 When Rare's *GoldenEye* first appeared in 1997 first-person console shooters were instantly given a massive shot in the arm (pun fully intended) and its impact sent shockwaves through the industry that continue to be felt to this day. Sniper rifles, four-way split screen, multiple missions, even duel analogue support (via two N64 pads) all made their first-person console debut in Rare's excellent shooter and even today it remains incredibly fun to play. With its wonderfully designed missions, intelligently structured level design, excellent array of weaponry and utterly amazing multiplayer it should come as no surprise to learn that the only N64 game to ever succeed it was the development team's very own *Perfect Dark*. High praise indeed.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE OCARINA OF TIME

- » RELEASED: 1998
- » DEVELOPED BY: IN-HOUSE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: SUPER MARIO BROTHERS

02 We remember playing *The Ocarina Of Time* like it was yesterday. Link's tearful farewell to Saria, learning about the Deku Tree's imminent death, walking out onto the vastness of Hyrule field, playing the titular Ocarina for the very first time – they're all moments that become indelibly etched on your mind forever. If *Super Mario 64* proved that classic 2D franchises could work perfectly well in 3D, it was *Ocarina* that truly showed console owners just how much breathtaking scope the third dimension could actually offer them. No other adventure in recent memory has matched the perfection of *Ocarina Of Time*, and it's quite possible that none ever will.



02

SUPER MARIO 64

- » RELEASED: 1996 (1997 UK)
- » DEVELOPED BY: IN-HOUSE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: DONKEY KONG

03 Few videogames have made the tricky leap from 2 to 3D as successfully as Shigeru Miyamoto's *Super Mario 64*. From the moment the Italian plumber's cheerful face appears on the title screen to the final boss encounter, Mario's first three-dimensional outing feels as natural as breathing. Beautifully structured, perfect to control (unlike the recent DS outing) and home to one of the finest 3D cameras ever created, *Super Mario 64* retains its title as the finest 3D platformer ever made. And if that's not a good enough reason to include it in this top ten, then we don't know what is. A masterpiece of game design that no true gamer should miss.

LYLAT WARS

- » RELEASED: 1997
- » DEVELOPED BY: IN-HOUSE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: SUPER MARIO WORLD

04 Playing through *Lylat Wars* (or *Starfox 64* if you're overseas) is like taking part in your very own space movie – hell it's actually better than many of the *Star Wars* games. Everything about *Lylat Wars*, from its soaring operatic music, to its jaw-dropping visuals has been done on such an impressive scale that you can't help but get fully immersed within the on-screen action. This sense of immersion is captured perfectly by your more-than-able Arwing co-pilots. Slippy, Peppy and Falco are now fully fleshed-out characters, while the opposing Starwolf team ignites an intense rivalry that was never apparent in *Starwing*. Fighting the forces of Andross has never been so much fun.

F-ZERO X

- » RELEASED: 1998
- » DEVELOPED BY: IN-HOUSE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: WAVE RACE 64

05 Okay, so it was yet another SNES update, but no other racer on the N64 (with the exception of Nintendo's very own *Wave Race 64*) came close to matching the sheer speed and excitement that *F-Zero X* offered. It may not have been the prettiest of games – there's a distinct lack of detail and plenty of fog – but it was amply compensated by the fact you could race against 29 other cars and that its snaking tracks zipped along at a blisteringly smooth 60 frames-a-second (something no 360 racer has currently achieved). With *F-Zero X* Nintendo managed to capture the very essence of racing in a 128mbit cart – nothing more, nothing less.



03



04



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06

BANJO KAZOOIE

- » RELEASED: 1998
- » DEVELOPED BY: RARE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: DIDDY KONG RACING

06 If proof was needed that Rare could do no wrong on Nintendo's N64, look no further than this superb platformer. Featuring a fascinating gameplay mechanic – Banjo and Kazooie could be manipulated in a variety of different ways to solve problems – beautiful looking visuals and some fiendishly clever level design, Rare nearly managed to do the impossible and create a game that was better than *Super Mario 64*! Brimming with charm and humour – special mention must go to the hilarious hoedown at the beginning of the game – and with just the right amount of item-collecting, *Banjo Kazooie* is a platform fan's dream and should be played by anyone with even a passing interest in the genre.



07

WAVE RACE 64

- » RELEASED: 1996 (1997 UK)
- » DEVELOPED BY: IN-HOUSE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: F-ZERO

07 *Wave Race 64* was one of the first launch games for Nintendo's new 64-bit console and it instantly set a precedent due to its incredible physics, convincing water and superb gameplay. The aforementioned physics allowed you to feel every ebb and swell that your jetbiker raced across, while the beautifully constructed courses ensured that you'd constantly return to them to shave precious seconds off your previous lap times. Over 20 years on from the original's release and it's still considered by many to be one of the Nintendo 64's greatest racers. It's certainly not a statement we're going to argue with.



08

SUPER SMASH BROS

- » RELEASED: 1999
- » DEVELOPED BY: HAL LABORATORY
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: KIRBY'S DREAM LAND

08 Trust Nintendo to take a popular genre (in this case the beat-'em-up) and add its own unique spin to it. *Super Smash Bros* allowed 12 of Nintendo's most popular videogame characters to battle against each other in an ecstatic orgy of over-the-top cuteness. Four brawlers could take part and the aim of the game was simplicity itself: send your opponents flying from the ring before they do the same to you. While it lacked intricate special moves and the depth of titles such as *Street Fighter II*, the sheer amount of items you had access to – everything from lightsabers to Pokémon balls – and the chaotic battles easily made up for *Smash Bros*' few shortcomings.



09

BLAST CORPS

- » RELEASED: 1997
- » DEVELOPED BY: RARE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: GRABBED BY THE GHOULIES

09 Rare's second N64 title was a game of such twisted brilliance that we're surprised a sequel to it has never appeared. When an out-of-control missile is set to destroy the world, you have to clear a path for it by jumping into a variety of different machines (including two giant robots) and destroying as much of the landscape as possible. The sheer destructive nature of the game harks back to the old arcade games of old, while Rare further fuelled the nostalgia buds by offering a variety of bonus levels that mimicked everything from *Pac-Man* to *Defender*. A refreshing, unique title that proved just what a powerhouse the N64 could be in capable hands.

SIN & PUNISHMENT

- » RELEASED: 2000
- » DEVELOPED BY: TREASURE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: MISCHIEF MAKERS

10 Treasure may have only released three games for the Nintendo 64, but we consider every single one of them to be a work of art that deserves to be played again and again. For the Perfect Ten we've decided to go with the superb *Sin & Punishment* though. Released in 2000, it pushed the machine like no other game before it had done. A simple on-rail shooter at heart, *Sin & Punishment* is nevertheless a giddy rollercoaster of a ride that instantly grabs you by the balls and doesn't let them out of its vice-like grip until the whole dizzying experience is over.



10

THE GOLDEN AGE OF GAMING



PLAYSTATION

Sony's PlayStation was an upstart console that shook the gaming world. It was all about Nintendo and Sega until the PlayStation came along and shocked everyone by shattering their dominance and overtaking both companies.

This was a system that embraced the future. It was the first console to focus on 3D, positioning it at the cutting edge of the medium. Indeed, Sony consciously played on the idea that it was on the edge, marketing the console towards young adults in a successful bid to be viewed as the cool system.

The PlayStation's use of CDs, rather than cartridges, was another forward-thinking move. The lower costs of the media and higher storage capacity proved to be a big advantage, and effectively signalled the death of cartridges.

Using discs meant that the PlayStation could play music CDs too, an early example of the multimedia functionality that would evolve to make our consoles into DVD players, Blu-ray players, and streaming devices.

Another key to the PlayStation's greatness was Sony's open attitude to third-party developers in comparison to its competitors' relatively closed-off approach. While it had a few successful properties of its own – *Gran Turismo* and *Crash Bandicoot*, for example – getting third parties on board meant that the PlayStation had great games coming out all the time. *Tomb Raider*, *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*, *Tekken*, *Metal Gear Solid* and *Final Fantasy VII* are just a few of the incredible third-party games that helped make the PlayStation an essential purchase.

Information

Manufacturer: Sony

Year: 1995

Expect to pay: £299 (launch), £20-40 (today)

TECH SPECS

RAM: 2MB main, 1MB video

Processor: 32-bit RISC MIPS R3000A

Audio: 16-bit, 24 channel ADPCM

Resolution: 256 x 224 – 640 x 480 pixels

Media: CDs

Graphics: GPU and Geometry Transformation Engine

"This was a system that embraced the future. It was the first console to focus on 3D, positioning it at the cutting edge of the medium"

The PlayStation in numbers

102.49 million
units sold

Almost
8000
games released

10 million
copies
of **Gran Turismo** sold



PLAYSTATION PERFECT TEN GAMES

The original PlayStation brought us a massive number of franchises that have become part of the gaming landscape today. Just take a look at the list below...



01

TOMB RAIDER

- » RELEASE: 1996
- » PUBLISHER: EIDOS INTERACTIVE
- » CREATOR: CORE DESIGN
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: FIGHTING FORCE

01 Although her star has waned a little since she first arrived on the scene, there's no denying that Lara Croft remains one of videogaming's most enduring icons. Her 1996 debut was actually on the Saturn, as developer Core Design had traditionally supported Sega's consoles. However, it was the PlayStation version – released shortly afterwards – that was truly responsible for firing the delectable Miss Croft into the realms of global superstardom. Sequels followed as it firmly became a PlayStation series and arguably improved on the template, but the original game retains a near-legendary status.

GRAN TURISMO 2

- » RELEASE: 1999
- » PUBLISHER: SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
- » CREATOR: POLYPHONY DIGITAL
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: OMEGA BOOST

02 The first *Gran Turismo* was possibly the most technically groundbreaking release of the 32-bit era, and this sequel beefed up the already considerable experience by adding more cars, more tracks and even a rally mode. The title's visuals – already pretty mind-blowing in the original release – pushed the 32-bit hardware to the absolute limit, with Polyphony Digital's unique development software eking out every last drop of power from the PlayStation in its final years. Spanning two discs, *Gran Turismo 2* is arguably the definitive racing title of that era and still plays great today.



02

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS

- » RELEASE: 1997
- » PUBLISHER: SQUARE
- » CREATOR: IN-HOUSE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: DEW PRISM

03 Released only in Japan and North America, this strategy RPG arrived around the same time as *Final Fantasy VII*, which caused some confusion when gamers discovered that they actually had very little in common. Developed by the team behind *Tactics Ogre* – Square snapped up studio Quest prior to producing the game – *Final Fantasy Tactics* showcases gorgeous visuals, breathtaking music and a surprisingly mature and complex plot. It was released on the PSP in a slightly enhanced form.

METAL GEAR SOLID

- » RELEASE: 1998
- » PUBLISHER: KONAMI
- » CREATOR: IN-HOUSE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: INTERNATIONAL SUPERSTAR SOCCER PRO

04 Hideo Kojima's magnum opus set a new high watermark for storytelling in videogames, as well as introducing an entire generation to the wonderful stealth sub-genre. Solid Snake has gone on to become a household name, starring in more technically impressive sequels on the PS2, PS3 and PS4 consoles. However, hardcore fans maintain that this instalment remains the best, thanks largely to its tight plotting, memorable characters and judicious use of the host hardware.

RESIDENT EVIL 2

- » RELEASE: 1998
- » PUBLISHER: CAPCOM
- » CREATOR: IN-HOUSE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: DINO CRISIS

05 The first title established Capcom's reputation as master of the 'survival horror' genre, but it was the second game in the series that truly confirmed the company's god-like status. Offering the ability to play the story with two different characters – one to each of the game's two discs, with differences depending on which you play first – *Resi 2* mixed relentless zombie slaughter with intriguing puzzles and some of the best visuals seen on the PlayStation up to that point. It's unsurprising that series fans hold this entry in the utmost regard.



03



04



05



06

TEKKEN 3

- » RELEASE: 1998
- » PUBLISHER: NAMCO
- » CREATOR: IN-HOUSE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: SOUL BLADE

06 *Tekken 2* had proven that Namco was more than capable of taking on Sega's illustrious *Virtua Fighter*, but it was the third game that dazzled the most. Sceptics had feared that it would never appear on the 32-bit console, but Namco's expert coders managed to squeeze in every aspect of the coin-op to create a fitting pugilistic swansong for the ageing PlayStation. While the Tekken Force and Tekken Ball modes were superfluous additions to the domestic port, all of the important features were present and correct.



07

EINHÄNDER

- » RELEASE: 1997
- » PUBLISHER: SQUARE
- » CREATOR: IN-HOUSE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: BRAVE FENCER MUSASHI

07 *Famous for being* Square's one and only entry in the shooter genre, *Einhänder* is an incredible achievement. The team involved had no previous experience with this type of game, yet it managed to create a classic that is still talked about in hushed, reverent tones even today. Featuring a unique weapon system based on grabbing the ordnance of fallen enemies, *Einhänder's* brilliance is made even more remarkable when you consider that Square hasn't ventured to the genre since its release.



08

FINAL FANTASY VII

- » RELEASE: 1997
- » PUBLISHER: SCE
- » CREATOR: SQUARE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: SAGA FRONTIER

08 *Having sold over 10* million copies worldwide, *Final Fantasy VII* needs no introduction. Cited as the game that sold the Japanese RPG to the Western mainstream, this three-disc epic made the most of the PlayStation's technical capabilities to deliver hours of turn-based entertainment. It remains arguably the most popular entry in Square's evergreen franchise and spawned several spin-off games and other projects, such as *Crisis Core* on the PSP and the *Advent Children* CGI movie.



09

CASTLEVANIA:
SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

- » RELEASE: 1997
- » PUBLISHER: KONAMI
- » CREATOR: IN-HOUSE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: PROJECT OVERKILL

09 *The PlayStation has* a reputation for being something of a duffer when it comes to 2D titles, and to a certain extent, this is true. The console had only 2MB of RAM compared to the Saturn's 4MB, and this resulted in some lacklustre conversions. However, titles like *Symphony Of The Night* – coded with Sony's hardware in mind – were mind-blowing. Fusing 2D and 3D effects, Konami's designers created one of the most mesmerising titles of the generation. Look out for the limited edition European version, complete with art book and CD.

VAGRANT STORY

- » RELEASE: 2000
- » PUBLISHER: SQUARE
- » CREATOR: IN-HOUSE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: FRONT MISSION 2

10 *One of the* most ambitious role-playing games of the 32-bit era, *Vagrant Story* is epic in every sense of the word. Produced by the same team responsible for *Final Fantasy Tactics*, the game featured a deep and sometimes disturbing storyline, and lead character Ashley Riot has to rank as one of the most hard-edged protagonists in videogame history. *Vagrant Story* was re-released on Sony's PlayStation Network to be purchased and downloaded for play on both the PlayStation 3 and PSP, and it even lives on through its shared universe with the *Final Fantasy Tactics* series and *Final Fantasy XII*.



10

POLLY POCKET

For many a girl and boy in the early 1990s, few toys were as sought after as Polly Pocket and Mighty Max. These miniature creations were a merchandising giant, offering a set of tiny figures and a playset all contained in one little hinged toy. Polly Pocket was the first to hit the market, originally starting out as a homemade toy created by British inventor Chris Wiggs. Around 1983, Wiggs used an old makeup compact case and fashioned a dolls' house inside for his daughter, Katie. Six years

later, Swindon-based company Bluebird Toys licensed the idea, and a new line of must-have toys entered the market.

The figures included were around an inch tall, with bases that could be secured onto fixed points inside each playset. Its portability made it an instant hit in playgrounds around the world, and it spawned the male spinoff, Mighty Max. Rather than cutesy dolls'-house designs, the MM range were giant skulls and monster

heads (known at the time as 'Doom Zones' and 'Horror Heads'). Like MM, Polly Pocket also spawned a TV series to capitalise on its success in the toy market.

American toy giant Mattel had acquired the licensing to sell Polly Pocket in the States, and when it eventually bought Bluebird Toys in 1998, it went about giving the entire line a much-needed makeover.

Polly and her friends were given a more lifelike appearance, and a new range of playsets was launched.

Information

Creator: Chris Wiggs
First released: 1989
Expect to pay: £10-20



While we're long past the days where Polly Pocket was a must-have toy on many a girl's (and boy's) Christmas list, the franchise still took a huge chunk out of the '90s' toy market. The brand has reportedly shifted more than 10 million units over the years, so there's no surprise it's getting a modern reboot.

The 1998 reboot was known as 'Fashion Polly', and was the first attempt by Mattel to transition the Polly Pocket range away from its pure miniature roots and into more of a doll creation. They came with stretchy rubber clothes, which was another first for the franchise.

Polly Pocket spun off into many a different medium over the years, including the world of videogames. It got an LCD handheld game from Tiger Electronics (remember those – they were huge in the ‘90s?) and a game on the Game Boy Advance, 2003’s *Polly Pocket! Super Splash Island*.

The Legacy

While Polly Pocket's popularity waned as the '90s gave way to the '00s, Mattel kept the line in production for years. Now using a larger, almost four-inch-sized set of characters, the range began to focus more on the fashion doll aspect than the original miniature gimmick. In 2010, Mattel attempted to relaunch the range, but by 2012 it had been discontinued in the US. Polly Pocket will be making a comeback in 2018 with a new line that uses the miniature format from the '90s (along with a new TV show).

Following the takeover of Bluebird Toys by Mattel towards the end of the '90s, the Polly Pocket playsets produced by the British manufacturer became far more valuable collectors' items. One classic set went for almost £7,000 on eBay in early 2018. Time to go check your old toy box!

TELETUBBIES

The '90s saw plenty of children's TV shows transform into cultural phenomena, but not many of them were aimed at preschoolers. Yet, when *Teletubbies* debuted on the BBC back in the spring of 1997, the simple and colourful world of four strange little baby creatures captured the imagination of kids and parents alike. It also became a merchandising beast, with the plush toys of its titular quartet – Tinky Winky, Dipsy, Laa-Laa and Po – becoming one of the most sought-after toys at Christmas that year. Teletubbies went head to head with Tamagotchi that year, with the red-coloured Po proving the most popular gift.

When it dropped onto BBC Two (back when we didn't have rolling kids' TV channels, but small slots on weekdays when children's television programmes would be broadcast), it

had the unenviable task of filling the slot previously occupied by the popular series *Playdays*. The over-simplified language and almost psychedelic qualities of repetition were a huge departure for kids' show formats at the time, but the change eventually proved its worth, with viewership skyrocketing to two million views per episode by August 1997.

It proved a huge draw internationally too, with broadcasts in 120 different countries around the world. That greater exposure also brought some controversy in 1999, with some groups suggesting the character of Tinky Winky – who was famed for carrying a handbag – was an overtly gay character who had no place in the children's TV show. The BBC responded with: "Tinky Winky is simply a sweet, technological baby with a magic bag."

Information

Creators: Anne Wood, Andrew Davenport
First broadcast: 31 March 1997
Episodes: 365 (original series)

The Legacy

The original series, which ran from 1997 to 2001, produced a staggering 365 episodes, which were repeated heavily in the years that followed. In 2015, the BBC revived the series, keeping the same format as before but with new actors in the Teletubbies' suits, a new baby playing the sun, a new narrator and a revamped set. Its format changed preschool programming drastically, paving the way for the likes of *In the Night Garden* and other sedate programming aimed at youngsters.

Much like *Power Rangers* before it, *Teletubbies* became such a cultural phenomenon, it even made its way into the music charts. A remix of the official theme tune became the Christmas Number 1 in the UK Charts in December 1997. It sold well over a million copies as well.





▲ To celebrate the show's tenth anniversary in 2007, its creators held a number of special events across the world. This included an invitation-only show in London and a number of locations in New York. The original four actors also appeared on *The Today Show* (marking the first time that they had been interviewed without their costumes).

▼ As well as plushies and a range of other toys, *Teletubbies* also got the kids' meal treatment. In 1999, Burger King in the United States did a promotion that included mini Teletubbies plush toys along with chicken nuggets shaped like the characters.



▲ Some of the actors involved in the show continued with careers in children's television. Pui Fan Lee (who played the original version of Po) is a regular on CBeebies, on shows such as *Show Me Show Me*, while Laa-Laa actress Nikky Smedley would go on to choreograph fellow BBC kids' show hit *In the Night Garden*.

SUPER SOAKER

Information

Manufacturer: Larami/Hasbro

First released: 1990

Expect to pay: £20-50 used,
\$100-200 new in box

In the early 1990s, two words were absolutely synonymous with dripping popsicles, playing outside until the sun set, and those wonderfully schoolless summer months: Super Soaker. Created by prolific patent-holder and NASA scientist Lonnie Johnson in his basement during spare evening hours in 1982, this soon-to-be revolution in water-gun culture was, believe it or not, born out of Johnson's attempts at creating a new kind of heat-pump technology for refrigerators and air-conditioning units. He shopped around the humble prototype – a hodgepodge built out of a two-litre soda bottle, Plexiglas and PVC pipe – for several years, until

finally catching a break with promising toy company Larami.

When it officially launched in 1990, the Super Soaker line didn't bare the now-recognisable (and totally radical) moniker, but instead the less-appealing Power Drencher label. However, poor sales and a name conflict with another inventor led to a full rebranding and relaunch in 1991. This, coupled with a memorable TV ad campaign that had young boys crashing a pool party with cool shades and pump-action pressurised water, resulted in more than two million Super Soakers being sold that year alone.

It turns out that – and to borrow language from a Super Soaker marketing slogan – wetter is indeed better. Whether it was the line's signature neon colours or the strong, reliable H₂O tech, the water was certainly on the wall: Johnson's new outdoor play device was a massive hit. And, more importantly, it left water balloon fights and traditional squirt gun battles in the proverbial dust.



Some of the first Super Soaker water guns released were the SS30 (orange and yellow), the SS100 (blue and yellow) and the bestselling SS50 (yellow and green), which every kid in existence seemed to own. It was this last model that earned Super Soaker an official nomination for the National Toy Hall of Fame.

Even celebrities fell under the Super Soaker spell. Johnny Carson was seen brandishing one of the neon water weapons on The Tonight Show in 1992, and Michael Jackson had a well-known obsession with the high-powered squirt guns, often hosting all-out water wars at his Neverland Ranch estate.

The Legacy

Super Soaker became such a ubiquitous cultural phenomenon in the 1990s that the brand name itself, similar to product mainstays like Kleenex or Band-Aid, became a way in which to refer to virtually any kind of pressurised or pump-action water gun. Even today, Hasbro is still (pun fully intended) pumping out fresh Super Soaker toys under its wide Nerf umbrella. While the name doesn't carry nearly the same retail clout it did decades ago, new generations are still passing forwards the drenched torch.



With the introduction of Larami's CPS (Constant Pressure System) in 1996 came the infamous CPS 2000, a revered model that arguably remains the most powerful stock water gun to ever hit store shelves. It even came with its own health and safety warning!



When Lonnie Johnson pitched Super Soaker to Larami in 1989, he closed the landmark deal in a fashion that only an inventor could – by using pressurised water to knock paper cups off a table from across the conference room. What toy company president could resist such salesmanship?

© Getty



The all-in-one design allowed all of the components to reside at the back of the display. Techies were delighted by the Power PC 750 233MHz central processing unit, ATI Rage IIC graphics card and 4GB hard drive. There were also two USB sockets, a couple of mini-jacks for headphones and built-in stereo speakers.

The Legacy

Steve Jobs was right when he told a crowd in 1998: "We think iMac is going to be a really big deal." After all, Apple continues to make iMacs today, with the top-end model being the £4,899 iMac Pro. The iMac G3 was eventually pulled after five years in favour of the ground-breaking flat-panelled iMac G4. The iMac G5 was launched in 2004, two years before Apple ditched PowerPC processors in favour of Intel, while the style of iMac we're familiar with today was introduced in 2007.

Information

Manufacturer: Apple
First released: August 1998
Expect to pay: £80 to £100

APPLE IMAC

It is becoming hard to remember the time when tech giant Apple was on its knees. But back in 1997, it was on the verge of bankruptcy until Steve Jobs – its gifted founder with a penchant for mock turtleneck sweaters – made a triumphant return and gave the company back its bite.

He blew a fresh breeze through the corridors of Apple's Cupertino headquarters, sweeping away a large and confusing line-up of computers and projects. Working with the now-acclaimed designer, Jonathan Ive, he also came up with the all-in-one desktop computer, the iMac G3, costing consumers in the US \$1,299.

With its gorgeous curved, egg-shaped styling and a translucent casing that eventually came in 13 different colours, the computer was a bold

statement, and unlike any other computer on the market at that time. If you looked closely, you could see the shapes of the iMac's innards: it packed a 233MHz PowerPC G3 processor and a 4GB hard drive. Most eyes were on the exterior, however, where there wasn't a straight line in sight.

Although the computer severed ties with the floppy disc, it adopted the USB standard. The iMac also shipped with the modern-looking Mac OS 8.1 – the biggest overhaul of Apple's operating system since System 7, which was launched six years earlier. There is no doubt this combination got people talking about Apple again, and the iMac ended up selling 800,000 units in under five months. In doing so, it sparked the beginning of a tremendous Mac revival.



There was no floppy drive but there was a 24x CD-ROM optical drive. The first models let you pop the discs into a tray, but this was discontinued in 1999 in favour of a slot. It was also possible to download software from the internet. With Safari not released until 2003, the browsers of choice were Netscape and Internet Explorer for Mac – made by rival Microsoft.

“With its gorgeous curved, egg-shaped styling and a translucent casing that eventually came in 13 different colours, the computer was a bold statement”



Bundled with each computer was an equally distinctive keyboard. Also produced using translucent plastic, it had black keys with white characters on them. Controversially, the single-button mouse was circular, and quickly (and unfavourably) compared to a hockey puck, with many believing it to be clumsy to hold and operate.



The iMac G3 was originally launched with Bondi Blue coloured plastic wrapped around the back of a 15-inch CRT display. Later colours included Blueberry, Grape, Tangerine, Lime, Strawberry, Graphite, Ruby, Sage, Indigo, Snow, Blue Dalmatian and Flower Power, each lending this iconic late-'90s computer a unique look that departed from the usual beige boxes.



© Getty

MIGHTY MORPHIN POWER RANGERS



When Israeli-American TV producer Haim Saban travelled to Japan on a business trip in the mid-'80s, he came across a broadcast full of characters in bright costumes, imbued with superhero strength and acrobatic fighting skills. That show was *Super Sentai*, a series that had been a staple for young Japanese fans since 1975. When he returned to the States, he eagerly helped put together a pilot – known as *Bio-Man* – which he shopped around various studios. When *Bio-Man* failed to catch a break, the show was re-edited with footage from *Kyoryu Sentai Zyuranger* (a contemporary version of *Super Sentai*) and renamed *Galaxy Rangers*. When Fox Kids picked it up in the early '90s, the rest, as they say, was history.

When the show premiered in 1993, it was more than just a hit; it was a veritable phenomenon. The colour-coded Rangers became household names, spawning a merchandising franchise powerful enough to give *Star Wars* a run for its money. It became a ratings machine, pulling in an average of 4.3 million young viewers, making the leap to cinemas with the hugely successful *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers: The Movie* (a film that grossed \$66 million from a \$15 million budget – not bad for one that was mauled by critics). Its theme even got to Number 3 in the UK charts. What other kids' shows can make that kind of claim? The brand is still going today, on its umpteenth reboot (and with a new film no less), but it's never quite recaptured the intensity of its '90s takeover.

Interestingly, the Green Ranger (who would go on to become one of the franchise's most popular characters) actually started out as a villain. Eventually, the man otherwise known as Tommy Oliver was eventually freed, with actor Jason David Frank returning multiple times over the decades to play the emerald Ranger.



Information

Creator: Haim Saban
First broadcast: 28 August 1993
Number of seasons: Three
(original series)

MIGHTY MORPHIN POWER RANGERS

▼ The show may have been popular between 1993 and 1995, but nothing compared to the popularity of its toy ranges. Lines consistently sold out in 1993, with Power Rangers figures – including the must-have original Megazord – proving the toy to own in 1994. By the following year, PR toy sales reached \$1 billion.

▼ When Saban acquired the rights to *Super Sentai* in the West, he didn't just straight up make his own version. To save money (and make it more attractive to eventual investor Fox Kids), the show used the fight scenes from the Japanese version and reshot the scenes where the rangers were in normal clothing with their Western cast.



The Legacy

The original *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* ran for three seasons – from 1993 to 1995 – before being rebooted as *Mighty Morphin Alien Rangers*. A further 23 seasons have followed in various guises (including a brief attempt to fully reboot the show in 2010), and it continues to bring in decent ratings on kids' channels around the world (as well as selling toys by the dozen). A cinematic reimagining was also made in 2017, but it failed to rekindle the magic of its heyday.

▼ The original show's reliance on the Japanese incarnation for its Ranger-based fight scenes led to a number of issues over the years, including the fact the Yellow Ranger was played by a woman in the West, but a man in the East. The Green Ranger died in the Japanese version, eventually forcing the West to turn him into the White Ranger.

BOP IT

Let's be honest, the '90s was *the* decade for weird and wonderful board games. Whether you were moving around a board while watching a creepy and faux-interactive VHS tape, or attempting to give a plastic crocodile so much needed dentistry, there were myriad ways to play unusual pastimes with family and friends. So, of course, these were the years when the strange and addictive toy that was Bop It took the world by storm.

Made by toy giant Hasbro, and first released in 1996, Bop It is as bizarre as it looks and sounds. The original version included three commands – 'pull it', 'twist it' and 'bop it' – with each one requiring a different action across its musical instrument-esque design. That first iteration only included one voiceover option, but packed in three very '90s game modes – Vox Pop, Solo Pop and Beat Pop – as well as using a musical set of tones to describe your score at the end of each round (a drum beat represented one point, a ratchet sound meant ten points, and a whistle was 100).

It was a huge success – especially in 1996 and 1997 – proving a hit with both young

and older audiences, mainly because it was so easy to pick up and play. Its design was updated into the Bop It Extreme, which added two more commands, a new layout, and an increased score. It proved just as popular as the original, and ensured Bop It has remained in production for years to come.

▼ In 2011, Hasbro launched a smartphone app version of Bop It on iOS and Android. It took all the physical commands of the toy version and translated them into on-screen gestures. While it lacks the tactile feel of the original, the inclusion of unusual twists (such as shouting into the microphone) makes it surprisingly addictive.



Information

Manufacturer: Hasbro
First released: 1996
Number of commands: Three
 (bop it, twist it, pull it)

As well as various new models and a smartphone app, the Bop It franchise also made its way into the virtual world of videogames. This included *Hasbro Family Games Night 2* for the Nintendo Wii and *Hasbro Family Games Night 1* for the Nintendo DS.

"These were the years when the strange and addictive toy that was Bop It took the world by storm"

Various voice-over artists provided the warped announcer's dulcet tones in the original versions of Bop It, but since the big 2008 relaunch, actor Buddy Rubino has been the voice of Bop It. He's provided vocals for all the modern versions of the game, including the app and the videogame incarnations.

The Legacy

The Bop It was updated in the '00s and beyond. The Bop It Extreme 2 arrived in 2001 with a new mode, volume control and redesigned inputs, while a Bratz-themed version dropped in 2004. In 2005, Bop It Blast introduced a higher score cap, and both male and female announcer voices. The series was overhauled in 2010 into the forms you see today.

THE INTERNET

We take the internet for granted today. It is, after all, an ever-present constant within our lives. It allows us to communicate better (arguably at least) and it lets us conduct research, buy items and have lots of fun. Yet in the early '90s, the world wide web was a virtual land of mystique and infinite possibility.

Time magazine summed it up in April 1993 as 'the info highway' that was 'bringing a revolution in entertainment, news and communication'. Indeed, a year later, the web browser Mosaic Netscape 0.9 was launched, achieving three quarters of the market after just four months. It evolved into Netscape Navigator, and anyone using it will remember how slowly pages loaded on the wheeze-sounding dial-up connections of those pre-broadband times. You would have to tell people to stop using the phone to let you connect.

Microsoft's Internet Explorer followed in 1995, but early websites were primitive. Everybody seemed to produce their own sites, based on their personal lives or hobbies. They'd add garish backgrounds, dazzling gifs, hit counters and stacks of hyperlinks to basic HTML page creations. Many hosted them on GeoCities where masses of fonts, lines of fire and dancing baby gifs proved very popular.

Yahoo!, which bought GeoCities in 1999, was, for many, the search engine of choice. It was more of a directory, letting you peruse categories to find useful websites. Some preferred Ask Jeeves, typing questions in the hope that a character based on PG Wodehouse's fictional valet would provide the answers. Others ventured into chat rooms, communicated on MSN Messenger, or fired messages using Hotmail addresses bearing embarrassing names.

One of the first free webmail services was RocketMail, which was acquired by Yahoo!. In 1997, it became Yahoo! Mail, largely competing against Hotmail, which was launched in 1996 and itself the subject of a takeover, this time by Microsoft. Millions also used AOL Instant Messenger, which launched in 1997 and allowed for real-time text chats.

The first ever website was launched in December 1990, and it described the world wide web project itself. It was hosted on a NeXT computer used by the web's inventor Tim Berners-Lee at the European research organisation, CERN, which put the WWW software into the public domain on 30 April 1993.



The Legacy

The world wide web, as invented by English scientist Tim Berners-Lee in 1989 (who also produced the first browser a year later), has indeed proven to be revolutionary. Email continues to thrive, but social media has also become an effective communication tool. Professional web design is an important job, and HTML, CSS and JavaScript are even familiar terms to ‘non-nerds’. The catalyst for the major advances has been broadband, which took off in the 2000s, bringing faster speeds and paving the way for better quality images, video and music streaming.

As with many internet ventures, Yahoo! was founded by entrepreneurial graduates meeting in California’s Silicon Valley. Jerry Yang and David Filo created the yahoo.com domain in January 1995, and its stock rose in line with other web portals such as MSN, Lycos and Excite. This continued throughout the decade until the ‘dot.com’ bubble burst.

Web addresses – or Uniform Resource Locators (URL) – were defined in 1994 by Tim Berners-Lee and a working group of the Internet Engineering Task Force. They specify the location of a web resource on a network and they are the ‘secret’ tool used to display websites in your browser.

Information

Key figure: Tim Berners-Lee
First website: December 1990
Biggest company in 1995: Netscape



POKÉMON TRADING CARD GAME

Information

Manufacturer: Nintendo/
Creatures Inc
First released: October 1996
(Japan), December 1998 (US)
Number of sets ('90s): Three
(Base set, Jungle, Fossil)

If you happened to be a child or teenager during the 1990s, you'll know that this was *the* decade for must-have toys. Kid-friendly items that were not just must-have accessories as they had been in previous decades, but were now their very own phenomenon. Much like *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* six years earlier, it would be another show with Japanese origins that would spawn a brand-new craze to take over school playgrounds and Christmas wishlists everywhere. Pokémon was upon us.

The late '90s saw the Japanese brand take over the world on all fronts. Starting out as a series of videogames on the Game Boy released in Japan in 1996 (we wouldn't get any of them in the West until 1998), a trading card game was soon launched the

same year. With the launch of the brand's ever-popular anime in 1997 – including an infamous episode that caused widespread seizures across Japan – Pokémon was everywhere come the final year of the decade. Combining the collectible craze of Pogs with that immutable Nintendo magic, the Pokémon Trading Card Game was an unstoppable giant of a franchise.

With *Pokémon: The First Movie* hitting cinemas in November 1999 and proving a huge box-office hit, every child worth their salt wanted their own collection of collectible cards. The palpable anticipation of opening a foil pack – the hope of finding a shiny Charizard within always in the back of your mind – was peak '90s, and helped to turn the franchise into a \$3.28 billion powerhouse by the end of the decade.

The Legacy

While Pokémon would shed its 'craze' status by the start of the '00s, the franchise would go on to become one of the most enduring and much-loved series in the world of collectible/trading card games. There are now over 70 individual sets of cards, and almost 10,000 individual cards spanning over two decades of continued releases. Some of the first-edition cards from the very first set are also worth a lot of money today; some being worth north of £3,000 for a single card in pristine condition.



The *Pokémon* games – where the franchise originally started – were also hugely popular for Nintendo, the collectible nature of its digital creatures driving sales alongside its card-based counterparts. *Pokémon Red, Green, Blue* and *Yellow* kept the Game Boy relevant throughout the '90s, and remain some of the most beloved entries in the series.

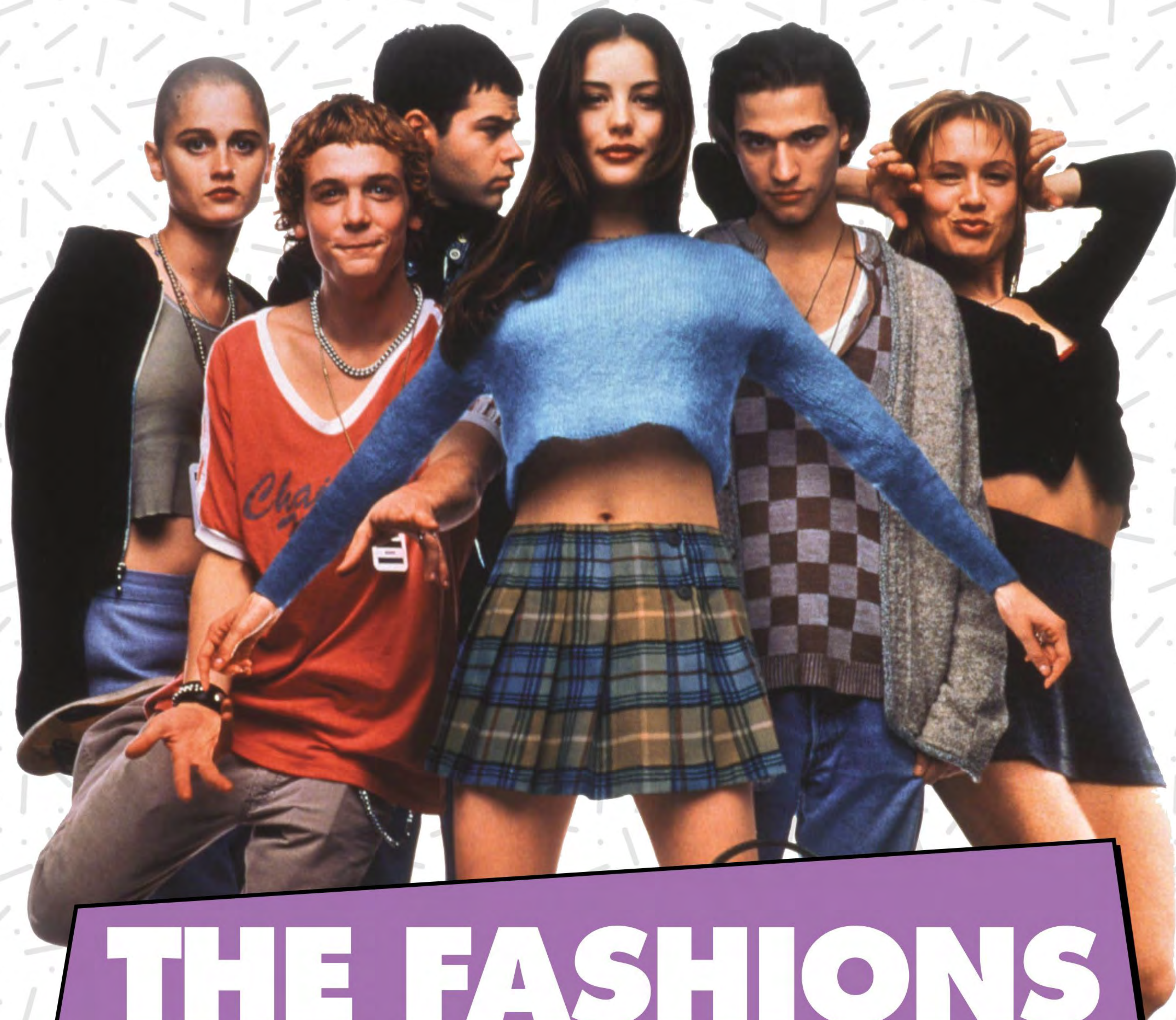
Of course, this being Nintendo, there was also a *Pokémon Trading Card Game* game, which was released on Game Boy Color in 1998 (it wouldn't arrive in the West until late 2000). It was another smash hit and included all three of the first sets (and some cards exclusive to the game you couldn't get anywhere else).

The Pokémon Trading Card Game certainly wasn't a cheap pastime. A booster pack would cost around \$4/£4, while a base set would retail for anywhere north of \$50/£50. It's a pricing model that has served the series well, even to this day.





By the end of the '90s, the Pokémon Trading Card Game was at its peak. The brand as a whole was so big that even *Time* magazine ran a story in late 1999 called 'Beware of the Pokemania'. Pokémon had arrived and was the toy that every boy and girl wanted.



THE FASHIONS OF THE '90s

From the deconstructed flannel power of grunge to the rise and fall of denim, these were the threads that made the '90s

When we think of the '60s, '70s or '80s, we can instantly bring their unique fashion trends to mind, but it's not so easy with the '90s. That's because there were just so many of them, crammed into ten small years of fashion fads and must-have accessories.

This was the era where 'casual chic' – driven by the popular rise of sports clothing brands and rising music scenes

such as grunge – became the norm. A time where T-shirts, hoodies and trainers became style trends of their own. It was here we saw the dominion of denim, from Levi's adverts to high-street takeover, and the new age of neon, filling our TV screens with colour schemes bright enough to remove your irises.

Body modification was no longer the symbol of the outlier, but a proud sign of

the times, with everything from piercings to tattoos finding their way into the zeitgeist. Even trends from previous eras found new life, with the 'Cool Britannia' scene reviving the 'mod' look, and fashion designers taking cues from the decade where disco was king. It was a hodgepodge. A melting pot. A veritable smorgasbord of fashion evolution. These were the styles of the time.



Grunge

Plenty of bands popularised many a fashion trend in the '90s, but few were inspired by one small scene. When grunge went global in mid-1992 – riding on the popularity of Nirvana, Pearl Jam and Alice in Chains – it brought a new unisex look comprising flannel shirts, oversized jumpers and baggy jeans.



Neon

One fashion trend that held the '90s in a garishly coloured grip bled directly from those who saw out the previous decade: neon. Everything from electric blue to fluorescent pink was the name of the day, with brighter colours and angle patterns (such as zig zags and jagged lines) speaking loud and proud.



Cool Britannia

With the rise of UK bands such as The Verve and Oasis, the mod culture of the 1960s saw a revival, with the return of longer, messier hair for men. Along with a new penchant for scooters came a love of paisley shirts, large bomber jackets and bootcut jeans. Around 1995-96 was also when real fur was dropped for the fake stuff.

Hip-hop

With the evolution of hip-hop in the early '90s came a new wave of fashion – fans began dressing like their favourite rappers from the East Side and beyond. Snapback caps were in (Raiders, naturally), as were gold chains, baggy jeans, sneakers and loose-fitting clothes (tying into the 'casual chic' memo that was circulating across multiple fashions at the time).



Goth

Goth rose to prominence in the '80s on the back of the New Wave music scene, but it transitioned from outlier fashion choice to a worldwide style trend thanks to a slew of hit teen flicks such as *The Craft*. The style brought leather jackets back into fashion for both men and women, saw black hair-dye selling by the bucketload, and a new love for fishnet tights.





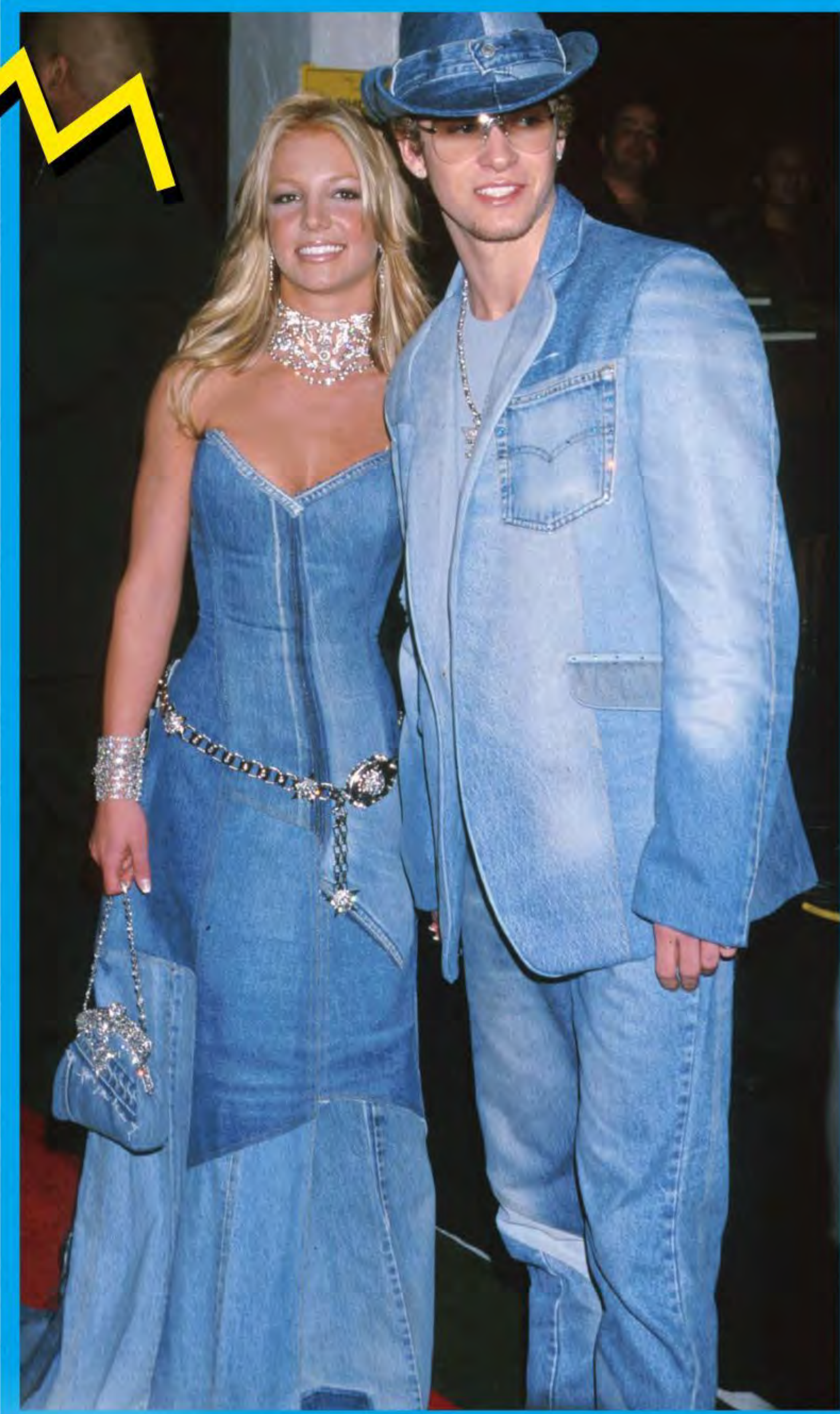
Skate punk

The skate scene – which found plenty of inspiration from rising pros such as Tony Hawk, as well as the ska punk music scene – also saw parallels with the likes of hip-hop and grunge. It too was casual, with a big focus on cut-down high-tops (air pockets were huge, too), sweatpants and big Tommy Hilfinger jackets.



Flattops

Finding popularity from the '50s onwards, the squarish haircut that was the flat-top briefly came back into fashion during the late '80s and early '90s. The style also segued into the hi-top fade, a haircut that rose to prominence in the US hip-hop scene in the early years of the decade. A certain Fresh Prince also rocked one.



Denim

For a while, denim was king in the '90s. It wasn't just for jeans – which became huge thanks to Levi's iconic mid-90s advert campaigns (*Spaceman*, anyone?) – but a whole wardrobe experience. Denim jackets were must-have items for both men and women, with everyone from Rachel on *Friends* rocking denim dungarees to supermodel icon Kate Moss modelling them in global campaigns.

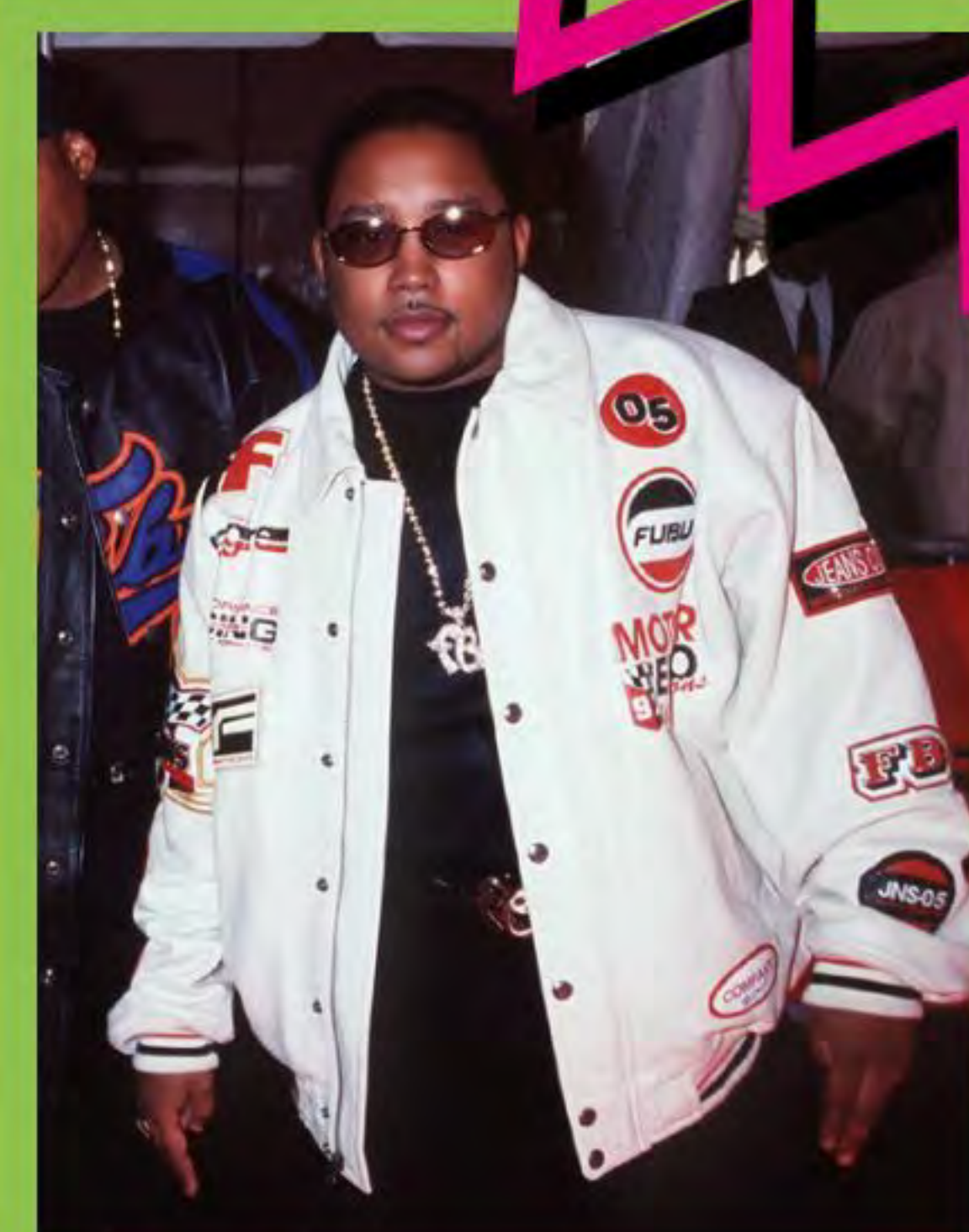
Shellsuits

A brightly coloured hangover from the '80s, the shellsuit continued to be a popular style choice in the early '90s – thanks mainly to the fact that garish colours and a loose fit were both very in at the time. They may have technically been sportswear, but the elasticated bottoms and zip-up jacket combo was an everyday choice when the decade was still in its youth.



Reebok Pumps

While it was first introduced in 1989, it wouldn't be until 1991 that the Reebok Pump really took off. The first shoe to house an internal inflation mechanism that expanded the size of the cushions inside the shoe and the tongue, it became one of many footwear that were synonymous with the NBA in the '90s.



FUBU

Launched in 1992, For Us By Us started out as a series of hats sold out of one man's house in New York. Designed for the African-American community – and inspired by styles from hip-hop – FUBU took off on both sides of the Atlantic. The FUBU brand covered everything from denim dungarees to football jerseys.

Timberland boots

Originally launched way back in 1973, the 'Original Yellow Boot' had a strong revival in the '90s when they became popular with hip-hop artists and groups such as Wu-Tang Clan, DMX and Mobb Deep. Along with a raft of 'sneakers', Timberland saw profits skyrocket as fans scrambled to grab a pair.

Bucket hats

An accessory that saw popularity on both sides of the Pond, the bucket hat wasn't just for keeping your head shaded from the sun – it was a bonafide fashion craze in itself. In the UK, the likes of Oasis and The Stone Roses made them their own, while Damon Dash, Ghostface Killah and Rakim owned them in the US.

The middle parting

Hairstyles were just as representative of the times as clothes and accessories, and few things said 'young person in the '90s' like a parting in the middle of your hair. From long hair to bowl haircuts, a pair of curtains was a common sight in schools, colleges and universities across the US and the UK.

Converse

Sometimes known as 'Chuck Taylors' in the US, Converse has actually been around since the 1920s in one form or another. The All Stars range saw plenty of popularity in the '90s, especially with the fashions spinning out of the grunge and hip-hop scenes. They're one of those few items that have popped back into fashion during multiple decades.



SOUTH PARK

When Stan Marsh, Kyle Broflovski, Eric Cartman and Kenny McCormick piled onto our screens in 1997, our worlds changed forever. These profanity-filled, 2D, stop-motion animated adventures were like nothing else on TV.

What started out as *Spirit of Christmas* – a four-minute stop-motion animation shot on 8mm film based on poorly cut-out characters – evolved into a slightly longer, award-winning, stop-motion animation based on poorly cut-out characters. And its fans wouldn't have it any other way.

Created by Matt Stone and Trey Parker, *South Park* focuses on the adventures of four school kids, their families, and the local community in a small Colorado

town. No controversial topic is off limits, which makes for hilarious, amazing and bizarre viewing.

Most of the characters are inspired by people in Trey and Matt's lives: Stan is based on Trey Parker and, like his cartoon counterpart, his father is a geologist called Randy, who is married to Sharon with a daughter called Shelly. Meanwhile, Kyle is based on Matt Stone, and his parents really are called Gerald and Sheila. Trey Parker's school friends served as inspiration for Kenny and Cartman.

The first ever episode – *Cartman Gets an Anal Probe* – aired on 13 August 1997. The series quickly became one of the most popular programmes on Comedy Central, and is now in its 21st season.

The Legacy

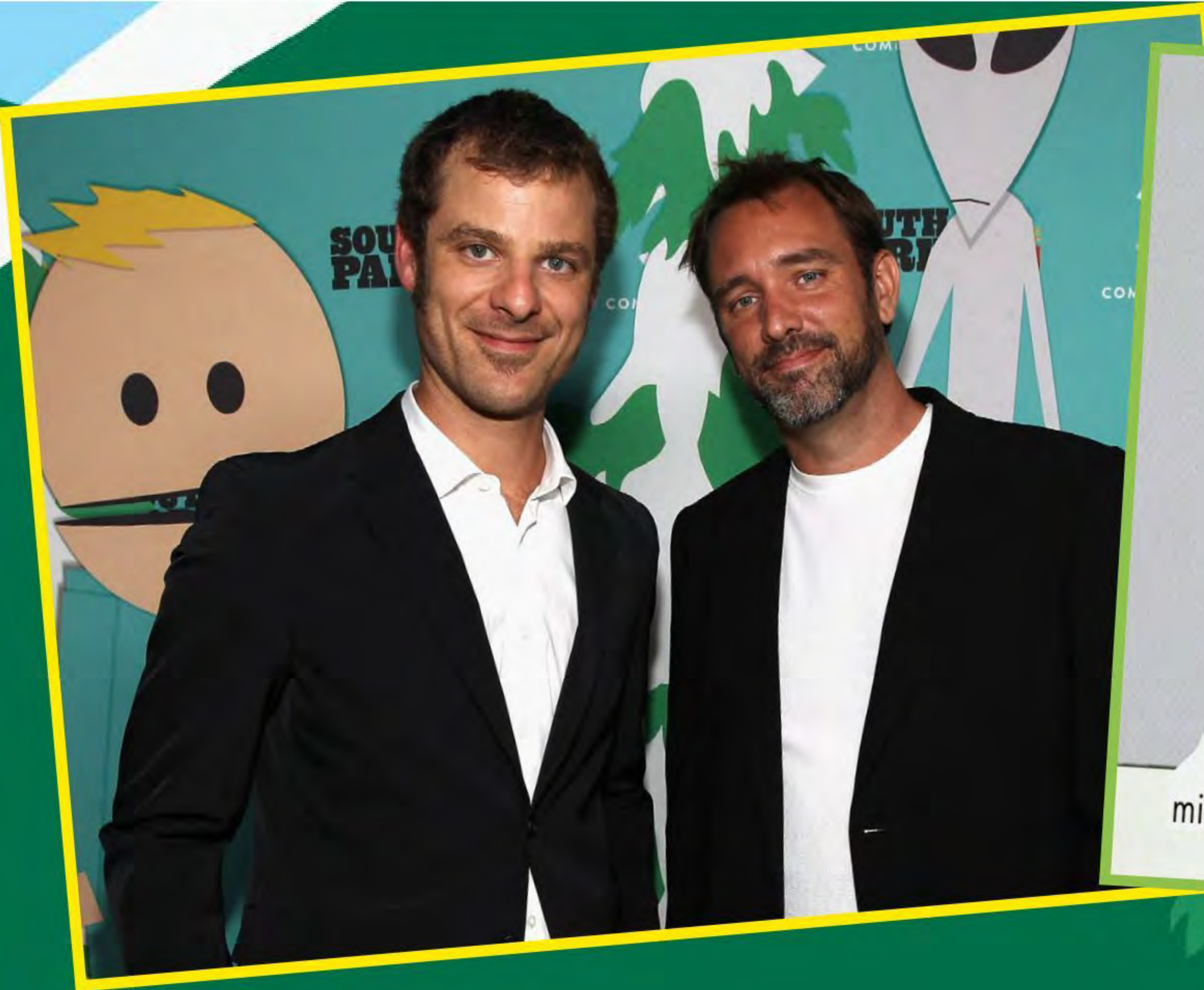
Even after two decades, *South Park* continues to push boundaries. Its revised, six-day production time means plots are topical. The team has only missed the deadline once, causing the studio to lose power. Its dedication to causing the most offense possible has no doubt inspired other adult cartoons such as *Rick and Morty* and *BoJack Horseman*.

Information

Original network: Comedy Central

First released: 1997

Seasons: 21



▲ Matt Stone and Trey Parker provide voices for some of the characters in *South Park*. Kyle, Kenny and Butters are all performed by Matt, while Trey voices Cartman, Stan and Randy Marsh's characters.



▲ *South Park's* Chef was voiced by soul singer Isaac Hayes. He performed the song *Chocolate Salty Balls (P.S. I Love You)* in the 1998 episode 'Chef's Chocolate Salty Balls'. The song reached number one on the UK singles chart at the end of the year.



▲ Kenny McCormick has died 98 times throughout different episodes of *South Park*. The team now no longer uses it as a plot tool, although it hasn't been written out completely.

THE DVD REVOLUTION

After the furore in the 1980s over which videocassette format would become standard (a battle that was clearly won by VHS), the scene was set for a similar conflict in the '90s. The adversaries were MultiMedia Compact Disc (MMCD) and Super Density Disc (SD), but fortunately for consumers, the companies behind the former abandoned it to create a new standard that merged properties from both formats.

This new technology was named DVD, standing for either Digital Versatile Disc or Digital Video Disc. Initially, the format was used primarily for movies, although

single-layer storage limitations meant that some films needed the disc flipped halfway through. Keen to avoid this inconvenience, dual-layer discs were quickly introduced, which also made way for additional space and another selling point for the new media: extra materials. These extras included documentaries, voiceover commentaries and deleted scenes, and were often a good enough reason (along with the improved picture and sound quality) to upgrade from videotape.

After years of magnetic tape, the advent of optical disc media was a massive jump, which the public certainly embraced. Now you were

able to watch and pause films with crystal-clear clarity, jump to chapter locations with ease, and enjoy superior sound quality. The effect was an almost-total domination of the market within five years, as the price of budget model DVD players dropped from the initial region of around £500 to under £100.

Much like compact discs, DVDs have enjoyed longevity largely because the format does its job effectively and efficiently. Despite competition from superior formats and instant streaming services, DVDs still dominate sales charts today, 22 years after the release of the first player.

"After years of magnetic tape, the advent of optical disc media was a massive jump, which the public certainly embraced"



Information

Manufacturer: Toshiba, Philips, Sony, Pioneer, Panasonic and others
First Released: 1996
Expect to pay: £500

THE DVD REVOLUTION

DVDs are also used for computer software (most notably videogames) and with sat nav units, before the advent of micro media such as SD cards. There are also several formats of recordable DVD, although use of these has dropped dramatically due to USB flash drives and streaming services.



Sony's PlayStation 2, released in 2000, was the first games console to use the DVD format, giving it a huge advantage over its rivals. The PlayStation 3 would continue the trend and contain a Blu-ray drive for movies and games.



Several types of boxes competed in the early days of DVD. Along with a jewel-style case, this card and plastic combination gave way to the standard we know today.

The Legacy

By the late '90s, high-definition (HD) technology had finally arrived, and with it two new rival formats to usurp DVD. HD-DVD (led by Toshiba) and Blu-ray (Sony) both contained technology that allowed for even higher capacity, ergo further improved picture and sound. The lesson from DVD was not learned, however, as the rivals clashed, making consumers reluctant to move up from their current players. Today, a clear winner has emerged in Blu-ray, but DVD's biggest threat comes from the advent of digital streaming services that offer an unparalleled ease of accessibility.

The first DVD player was the Toshiba SD-3000, released late in 1996 in Japan. Western models were first released in the United States the following year. Other notable early models include the Sony DVP-S7000, Panasonic DVD-A100 and Pioneer DVL-700, an impressive DVD/Laserdisc combination unit.

SUPERTED

Information

Manufacturer:

DIC Entertainment

First Released: 1990**Expect to pay:** £19.99 (import DVD)

There were some pretty strange kids' TV shows in the 1980s, but *SuperTed* is up there with the oddest. It's the story of a teddy bear that is thrown away when the toy factory discovers something wrong with him. Soon afterwards, when the teddy is sitting alone in a dark storage room, a Spotty Man from space appears in his rocket ship, and uses cosmic dust to bring him to life. From there, the pair go to a magic cloud, where Mother Nature gives the teddy special powers and he becomes SuperTed.

The show featured some equally odd villains, including a Texan cowboy, an overweight guy who made fat jokes, and a camp skeleton. SuperTed and Spotty Man would stop these dastardly foes succeeding

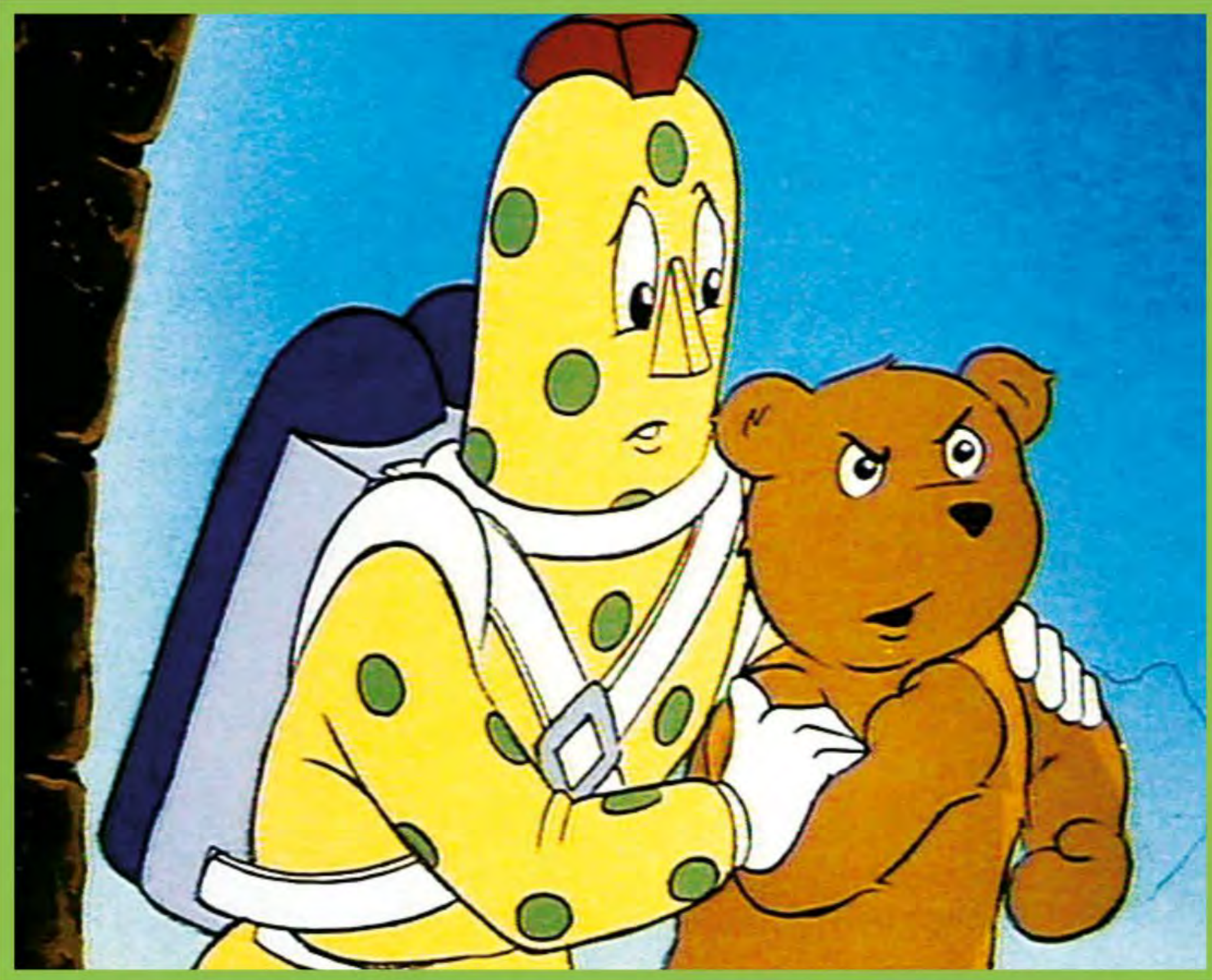
in all kinds of crazy schemes, including robbing Incan temples and stealing the pocket money of children. Only the most evil villains would do stuff like that!

The TV show was originally the creation of Mike Young, who had made up the character as a way to help his son conquer his fear of the dark. Young decided to turn the stories into a series of books, ultimately writing more than a hundred. When Young was approached to write *SuperTed* for the screen, he was determined to make the series Welsh. He created a production studio in his home country, creating jobs, and the Welsh language show was soon translated into English for the BBC, ensuring SuperTed became a household name across the UK by the end of the third and final series in 1986.

SuperTed

SuperTed is the hero who always saves the day. He got his powers from Mother Nature – when he says a secret, magic word, he transforms into SuperTed. He has rocket boosters in his boots to help him fly, and is always brave, even in the dark!





Spotty Man

This mysterious alien landed on Earth and used his magical cosmic dust to bring a teddy to life. He now travels around with SuperTed, stopping the evil trio of Texas Pete, Bulk and Skeleton from completing their dastardly schemes.

The Legacy

SuperTed became the first British cartoon series to be shown on the Disney Channel, in 1984. A new series, *The Further Adventures of SuperTed*, was created in 1989 in collaboration with Hanna-Barbera; the UK version of this show was redubbed, with the original voice actors returning to their roles. Mike Young has been working on a reboot for the character since 2014, and rumours of a new series starting soon have been swirling.



Texas Pete

The leader of the three villains, Texas Pete is a cowboy who has all kinds of crazy plans. Whether he is trying to take over a new galaxy and make it his own, or stealing treasure, his plans are always foiled at the last minute by SuperTed.

Skeleton

The very cowardly Skeleton often falls apart – literally – when SuperTed and Spotty Man try to stop the group's plans. However, he can be put back together again without too much trouble. He wears pink slippers, and was described as “flamboyantly gay” by the show's creator, Mike Young.



Bulk

Bulk is a very stupid baddie who is always saying foolish things in response to Texas Pete's plans. He's very fat, and serves as the muscle in Pete's gang – creator Mike Young recently said he would likely make changes to the character if the show was rebooted.



THE X-FILES

The X-Files was a cornerstone of TV viewing in the '90s, and has recently been resurrected by Fox. Take a look back at how the adventures of Mulder and Scully started

It's easy to forget just how phenomenally successful *The X-Files* was on its original release. Chris Carter's creation elevated David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson into the stratosphere, spawned two films and a spin-off TV show, and led to endless merchandise that ranged from books to videogames, playing cards and everything in between. Countless actors, including Jack Black and Seth Green, as well as Jane Lynch and Aaron Paul, all had fresh-faced appearances on the show before they hit the big time, while Mark Snow's incredibly creepy theme tune reached second place in the UK singles chart, staying there for three weeks. At one point in the '90s, Chris Carter's show seemed to be everywhere. So it's mind-boggling to learn that Carter's original script was actually rejected by Fox executives.

A NEW CONCEPT

Tired of the numerous comedies he had worked on for Disney, Carter came up with a new concept that was inspired by what he had read about the Watergate scandal of the '70s, and the fact that nearly four million Americans believed they had been abducted by aliens. Carter also drew on his experiences of '70s cult TV show *Kolchak: The Night Stalker*, which featured a newspaper reporter who investigated mysterious crimes that were typically linked to science fiction or the supernatural (Darren McGavin who starred in the show would eventually appear in two *X-Files* episodes). Other influences that would shape the direction of *The X-Files* included *The Twilight Zone* and *Twin Peaks*, but one of the most important was perhaps *The Silence of the Lambs*, as Carter felt it was plausible that FBI agents would be interested in investigating the unusual cases that would form the basis of the show.

Casting proved problematic for Carter, particularly when it came to casting Agent Scully. While he was instantly impressed with the chemistry Gillian Anderson had alongside the already cast Duchovny, the

studio was less than impressed with the 24-year-old actor. It wanted someone who was either well known, or was ideally 'leggier, breastier or blonder', but Carter fought hard for Anderson, and was eventually rewarded when she won several awards for her portrayal of the sceptical agent, including an Emmy and a Golden Globe. There would be a lot more acclaim in store for the show, though, and it would become one of the cultural cornerstones of the '90s.

GOING GLOBAL

Despite the fact that the pilot episode of *The X-Files* attracted 12 million viewers, and the final episode drew 14 million, it certainly wasn't enough to consider the show a success at first. In fact, it was actually ranked 105th out of 128 shows for its television season, which wasn't the best of starts. It continued to climb in the ratings, though, season by season. By its third season, it was ranked 55th, but more importantly to Fox, was scoring well with the 18-49 age advertising demographic, and the merchandise began to flow as a result. By the fifth season, the show hit its peak with an opening of more than 27 million, and a Super Bowl special that was viewed by 29.1 million. The series ended as the 11th best-ranked show of the year overall, and Fox's highest rated show in general.

By this point *The X-Files* was a cultural phenomenon. A crossover episode with *The Simpsons* called *The Springfield Files* was a huge success, and also roped in another sci-fi stalwart, Leonard Nimoy, to frame the episode, while the show's impact became so big that Fox commissioned a movie for release in cinemas in 1998. *The X-Files: Fight the Future* bridged the gap between seasons five and six, and made nearly \$190 million off a \$66 million budget. In true *X-Files* fashion, it posed as many questions as it answered, but it went down well with fans, and proved the show could find success outside of its core audience. In fact, a follow-up film, *The X-Files: I Want to Believe*, arrived in 2008, six years



"Carter fought hard for Anderson, and was rewarded when she won several awards for her portrayal of the sceptical agent"

The X-Files game

While the very first videogame based on *The X-Files* divided critics, it ties into the show perfectly; effortlessly capturing what made Chris Carter's show so watchable in the first place. The developer, Hyperbole Studios, initially turned down the project, only jumping on board once it started watching the TV series (the game itself is loosely based within season 3). Players take on the role of FBI agent Craig Willmore who must investigate the disappearance of Mulder and Scully. It's a slow-burning adventure, elevated by some excellent (for the time) full motion video. While the PlayStation version is quite cheap, just be aware that it comes on four discs.



BEST EPISODES



Squeeze

The very first Monster-of-the-Week episode in season one remains one of the best from the series. Doug Hutchinson stars as Eugene Victor Tooms, a mutant serial killer who can contort his limbs and hibernates for years at a time. 'Squeeze' proved so popular that Hutchinson reprised the role of Tooms later in the season.



One Son

This fantastic episode concludes the original Syndicate story and follows on directly from the previous episode, 'Two Fathers'. It not only satisfyingly clears up most of the ongoing story arcs from the previous five series, including the abduction of Mulder's sister, Samantha, but also highlights just how evil the Cigarette Smoking Man actually is.



Bad Blood

As early as season two, *The X-Files* proved its leads were adept at comedy with 'Humbug'. One of the funniest, however, is this excellent offering from season five, which features Mulder and Scully giving very different versions of events to an exasperated Skinner after Mulder kills a suspected vampire during the episode's opening.

after the final episode of season nine ended, although it did far worse at the box office.

Merchandise was another example of the show's enormous success, and it came in a variety of forms. Numerous books were released, aimed at a variety of ages, which were either based on episodes or took the form of standalone stories. There was also a spin-off comic series that ran between 1995 and 1998, a monthly periodical, a collectible card game, three videogames, soundtracks, clothing and numerous VHS and DVD releases.

The X-Files eventually hit a stumbling block from season eight, when Duchovny expressed an interest in leaving the show, and as a result only appeared in half of the season's episodes. Robert Patrick and Annabelle Gish were brought in as additional agents, and while they proved popular with critics, fans began to leave the show. A spin-off show, *The Long Gunmen*, which focused on three investigators who Mulder often went to for support, was also launched during this time. Despite generally positive reviews, it failed to find an audience, and was cancelled

after one season. By the ninth and then final season, viewing figures were at an all-time low, with just ten million tuning in for the season's opening and 12 million watching the (somewhat disappointing) finale, the lowest figures ever for a season closer. Fox decided that it was time to call an end to the show, but in a way, it would eventually turn into a new beginning for the evergreen series.

LEGACY

Demand for *The X-Files* was so high that Fox eventually persuaded Duchovny and Anderson to return in 2016, with season 11 following the next year. Although its revival hasn't perhaps been the success Fox was hoping for, there's no denying the impact the TV show had had on modern TV since its debut in 1993. Its overall mythology story arcs (a rarity at the time) are now commonplace in numerous television shows, while its ability to constantly employ different



directors, who all gave the show a different tone and feel, is also commonplace today. In fact, shows like *Game of Thrones* regularly reveal its directors as part of a season's reveal (one of which is long-time *X-Files* director David Nutter).

And then of course there are shows like *Breaking Bad*, which might not have even existed if creator Vince Gilligan hadn't received his big break on *The X-Files* and became an acclaimed writer in the process. Shows like *Supernatural* owe a huge debt to the groundwork laid by *The X-Files*, with its Monster-of-the-Week episodes and the complex relationship between its two leads, and let's not forget the likes of *Fringe*, *Miracles*, *Warehouse 13*, *American Horror Story*, *Dark Skies*, *Freaky Links*, *Grimm* and countless other TV shows that have followed in the show's wake.

The X-Files inspired Catatonia to write a song entitled *Mulder and Scully*, while *Silicon*

Valley's Kumail Nanjiani is a huge celebrity fan who has made countless podcasts about the show, and even wrote *The Big Sick* based on his love for the season two episode 'One Breath'. The pop culture for *The X-Files* is deep, and can be found in countless TV shows and films. *American Dad*, *The Simpsons*, *The Big Bang Theory*, *Independence Day*, *Monsters vs Aliens* and even *House MD* have mentioned the show or featured its stars, highlighting just what an impact Chris Carter's show had on countless aspiring writers, directors and producers.

The X-Files was a watermark moment for TV, both in its quality and in its execution, and its influence stretches far and wide. The truth might still be out there for its characters, Mulder and Scully, but we've known the truth for a very long time now and it's this: *The X-Files* is one of the most important television events of all time. May its legacy continue.



"The pop culture for *The X-Files* is deep, and can be found in countless TV shows and films"



MIGHTY MAX

With Polly Pocket proving that miniature playsets were a big hit with pre-teen girls, it was only a matter of time before Bluebird Toys expanded on the concept, and introduced a line of matching tiny products aimed squarely at young boys. Sporting the same compact, self-contained design as its successful sister line, Mighty Max hit store shelves in 1992, backed by a simple premise: titular Max finds a magical baseball cap that allows him to open mysterious portals, and these shimmering gateways lead to all manner of sinister otherworlds and supernatural situations. Exciting exploration, close-call battles and near-death escapes ensue.

Such a fantastic foundation allowed for edgy, oftentimes gross and ultimately horror-themed aesthetics – snakes, spiders, bats, zombies, dragons, aliens, lava monsters and even rampaging dinosaurs were regular adversaries in Bluebird's radical plastic universe. Each detailed playset came packaged with a small Max figurine and a handful of unique villains, all of which could be stored neatly inside the moulded clamshell when snapped shut. The resulting carrying case was either a grotesque outer face or pleasantly unsettling creepy crawler.

First came the Doom Zones, hand-sized playsets that arguably served as the line's signature configuration. Then there were the Horror Heads, slightly smaller variants, followed by the Monster Heads and Shrunk Heads, which were even more bite-sized in dimension. There were also action figure-style Battle Warriors, as well as larger layouts like Dragon Island, Terror Talons, and the absolute must-have mega-set Skull Mountain.

Freaky, imaginative, collectible and perfectly portable. What more could a '90s kid ask for? Mighty Max, Mighty Max!

Information

Manufacturer: Bluebird Toys
Distributor: Mattel/Irwin Toy
Expect To pay: \$10-50 per loose playset, up to \$100 for MOC

Cancelled prematurely during the prototype phase, Into the Battle Zone was an abandoned wave of Mighty Max products that never quite made it to store shelves. It included vehicles, light-up figures, fortresses and awesome new Doom Zones like a mummy, a toad and a ferocious piranha.



The Legacy

Unfortunately, the miniature horror revolution that Mighty Max pioneered hasn't exactly carried over into modern times. While the toys managed to spawn other micro 1990s' playsets from big franchises like TMNT, Godzilla, Star Wars and even Primal Rage, the fad eventually passed. Chalk it up to changing market trends or choking hazard liability, the closest thing we currently have to Mighty Max might be Moose's Grossery Gang. Rumours of a proper reboot have circulated for years, all without official confirmation.

1993 saw the television premiere of the official *Mighty Max* animated series. It introduced a slightly older adolescent Max, as well as two new sidekicks – Viking strongman Norman and wise fowl Virgil. The show ran for two seasons (a total of 40 episodes), and boasted one seriously sick theme tune.

Some of the playsets released later in the line's lifespan are especially difficult to find, and usually fetch high aftermarket prices. The Series 2 Shrunk Heads and Series 3 Doom Zones received an especially low production run, as did the un-openable Monster Heads and several of the Battle Warriors.

A Mighty Max videogame was released for both the Mega Drive/Genesis and Super Nintendo in 1994 by Ocean Software. Panned by critics and gamers alike, it sported some seriously tedious 2D side-scrolling action that made poor use of the excellent licence. At least some copies came with a free VHS tape.

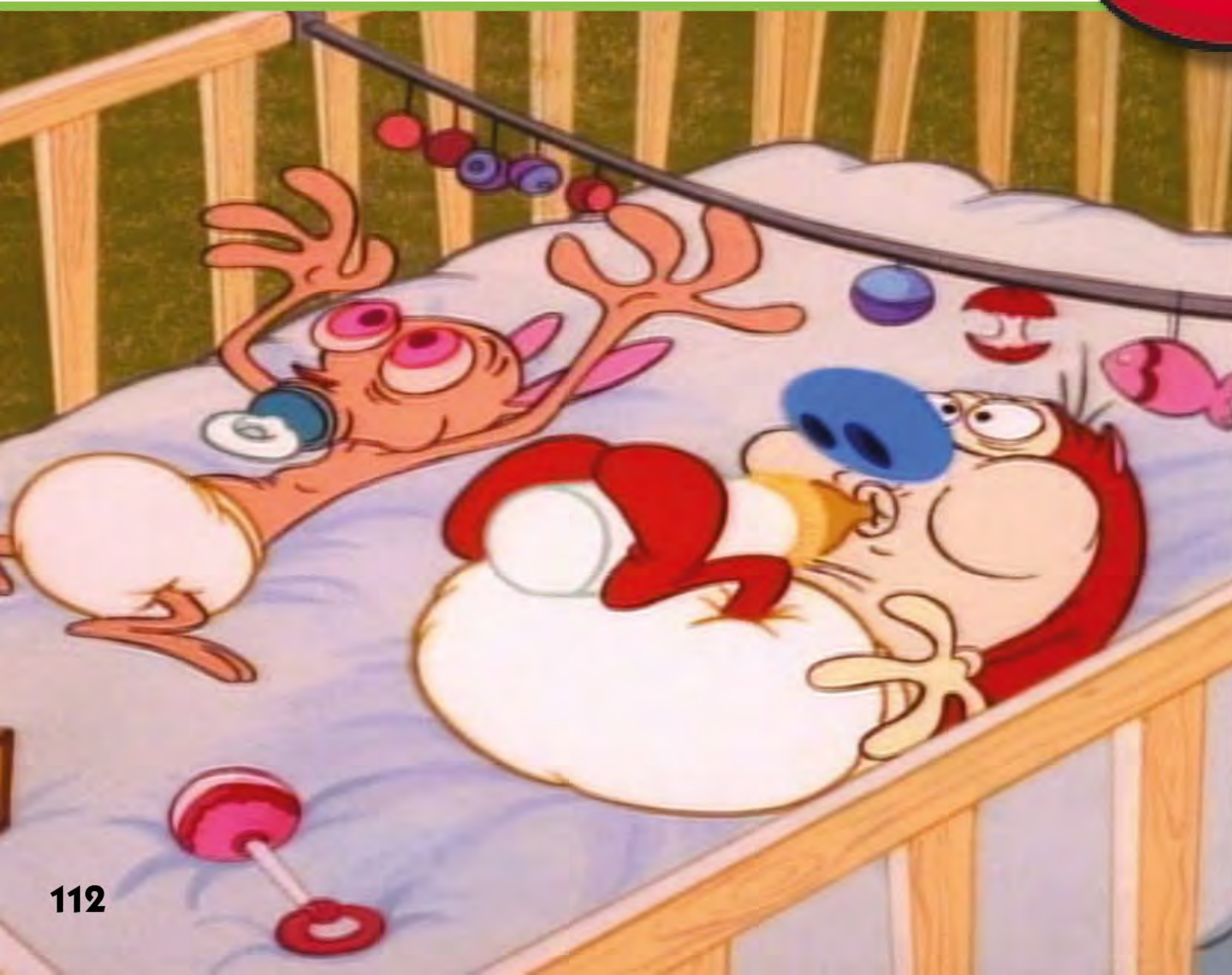
REN & STIMPY

Even today, there are few cartoons able to elicit the same nauseous mix of riotous laughter, creeping unease and guttural revulsion as animator John Kricfalusi's edgy Nickelodeon classic. Launched on the orange-splat network in August 1991 alongside fellow Nicktoons trailblazers *Doug* and *Rugrats*, *Ren & Stimpy* was a gross-out tour de force filled with surreal, often disturbing imagery that enthralled young watchers and left swaths of concerned parents asking the honest question: Is this weird show, starring an angry chihuahua and a dimwitted cat, really for kids?

Kricfalusi, who had worked on cartoon staples like *The Jetsons* and *Tom & Jerry* prior to setting out on his own, was a huge proponent of completely unique animation frames, often discouraging his team from ever drawing the same movement or facial expression twice. Wild, unhinged and initially bolstered by a creatively open

relationship with Nickelodeon, *Ren & Stimpy* explored outlandish, uncanny storylines that involved taboo subjects like unapologetic innuendo, sexual undertones, gratuitous nudity, gallons of bodily fluids and some seriously questionable mental health. In one strange episode, Ren resigns himself to a hermit's life inside a cave, during which he begins to literally go insane, concocting companions out of bat guano and his own disembodied feelings. In another, Stimpy passes gas and gives birth to a sentient fart that goes missing.

The whole business was a circus aimed at children, but also not really intended for children at all. That may be where *Ren & Stimpy*'s true brilliance resided, in its willingness to totally break the mould, and such indelicate gall changed cartoons forever.



Information

Studios: Spumco/Games Animation/Nickelodeon
First released: 1991
Number of episodes: 52



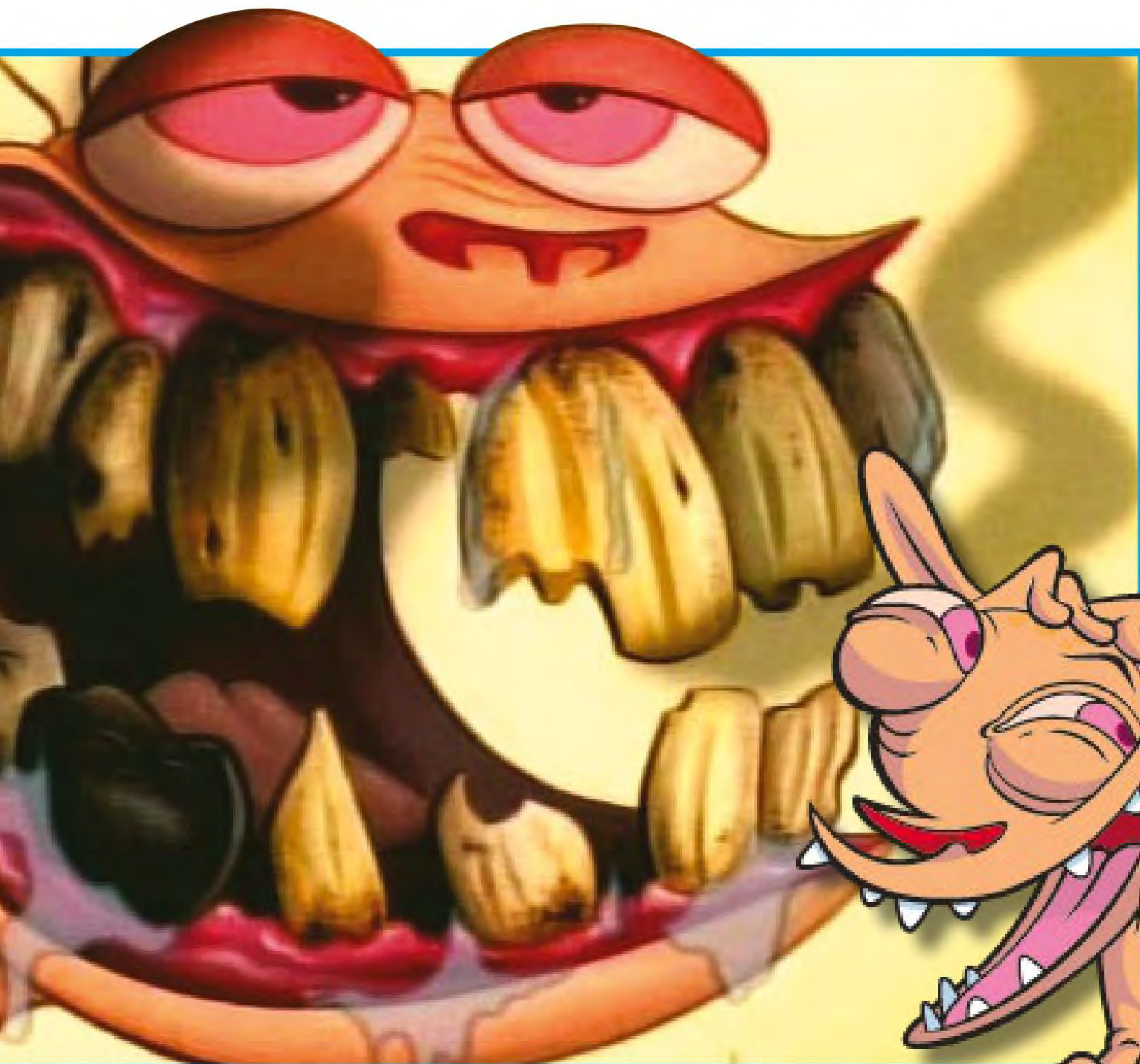
▲ In September 1992, *Ren & Stimpy* creator John Kricfalusi was fired from his own show due to growing tensions between the controversial animator and Nickelodeon. Billy West, who originally only voiced Stimpy, subsequently took over vocal duties for Kricfalusi's Ren after the fallout, an ongoing point of contention between the two.



▲ The characters of Ren Hoek and Stimpson J Cat were actually conceptualised almost a decade before the show's pilot officially went into production for Nickelodeon in 1989. During their college years in Canada in the late 1970s, John Kricfalusi and his friends created the infamous duo. Why? Mostly for laughs and personal enjoyment.

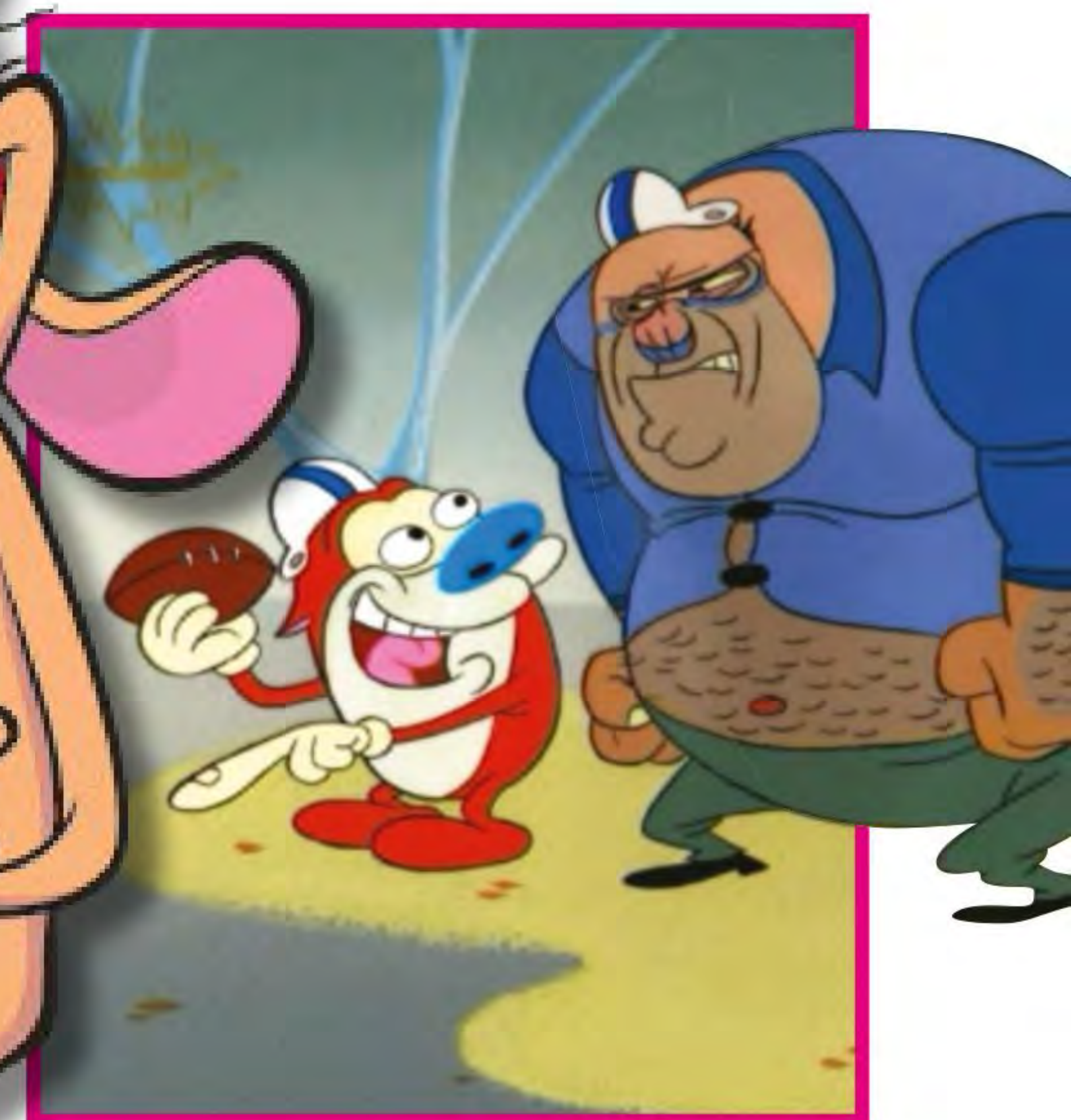
The Legacy

In many ways, *Ren & Stimpy* was a pioneering precursor to other offensive animated endeavours like *South Park*, *Family Guy* and *Rick and Morty*. Although it was largely marketed to children, the show was arguably the first mainstream mature cartoon for adults, one that proved how pandering to an audience with hamfisted niceties and goofy morals wasn't necessary for maintaining a modern viewership. Its far-reaching influence can still be seen in the bizarre details and general irreverence of today's hit kid programs like *SpongeBob SquarePants* and *Adventure Time*.



▲ One of *Ren & Stimpy*'s most recognisable and influential signatures was its disgustingly exhaustive closeups. The show would sometimes pull away from the more traditional animation to showcase gruesome painted depictions of body hair, lice, rotten teeth, open wounds, blisters and other unsavoury awfulness in excruciating detail.

▼ Many felt that *Ren & Stimpy* was never the same after John Kricfalusi, along with much of the original animation team, left in 1992 amid internal conflict. Still, the show managed to last via Games Animation at Nickelodeon until the December of 1995, during which the final episode aired.



"Ren & Stimpy explored outlandish storylines that involved taboo subjects like unapologetic innuendo, sexual undertones [and] gratuitous nudity"

BEANIE BABIES

Today, Beanie Babies are as ubiquitous as most other soft-toy brands, but back in the '90s it was a toy craze that became so popular collectors descended into bank-balance-destroying bidding wars to own the most exclusive editions. Some single toys would go for as much as ten times their original prices. Creator Ty Warner would often 'retire' certain designs, a tactic that made them even more popular – and sent collectors into overdrive in a mad bid to acquire each new rarity.

The Beanie Babies craze reached its peak in 1998, with sales exceeding \$1.4 billion, but they were first released back in 1993 with only nine different designs on offer. Warner's decision to only sell them to select retailers made them novelty items at first, but a promotional campaign in 1996 with McDonalds – which saw miniature versions packaged in Happy Meals – was the catalyst that sent the world into Beanie Baby mania.

That limited availability tactic that made Beanie Babies so popular – the 'Beanie

Babies boom' as it became known at the time – also played a role in its eventual downfall. Many were touting the plush toys as long-term investments that would pay dividends down the line, but the reality was a craze that peaked and fell rather sharply, leaving many toys that were no longer worth the thousands of pounds they had been bought for. That 'boom' did make Ty Warner one of the richest men in the toy industry, his must-have toys setting countless sales records before the decade was out.

Information

Creator: Ty Warner

First released: 1993

Most expensive model:
Princess the Bear (\$500,000)



"The Beanie Babies craze reached its peak in 1998, with sales exceeding \$1.4 billion"



The Legacy

With creator Ty Warner famously retiring certain Beanie Babies throughout its peak, it shouldn't have come as much of a surprise when he announced in 1999 that he would be retiring the entire brand itself. He even released a commemorative bear called 'The End' to mark the occasion. Fans reacted negatively to the decision, and following a public survey, Warner decided to revive the brand in 2000. The next toy produced was called 'The Beginning', but the boom had already gone bust.

▲ An attempt was made to 'reboot' and relaunch the brand in 2008 with Beanie Babies 2.0. The new line of toys came with a code that gave the user a link to a special interactive website, but the gimmick failed to spark the same kind of heated fervour among consumers that the original incarnations had so many years before.

In 1999, Beanie Babies made the headlines for a very different reason. One couple's divorce led to a rather acrimonious confrontation when it came down to dividing up their prized collection. The collection was valued between \$2,500 and \$5,000 at the time, and the judge ordered they be brought into court and physically divided between the former husband and wife.



▲ With any big toy craze comes the inevitable knock-offs, and Beanie Babies had plenty at the height of their popularity. Counterfeit versions started surfacing around 1997, with the productions and transport of fake Beanie Babies becoming a big business on the black market. Thousands of counterfeit plushies were confiscated during the late '90s.

▲ The Beanie Babies brand had plenty of sought-after and uber-popular models, including the tie-dyed Garcia the Bear, Princess the Bear (created in memoriam for the late Princess Diana), the copyright-infringing Tabasco the Bull and the incredibly popular (and very rare) Peanut the Royal Blue Elephant.



CROCODILE DENTIST

Information

Manufacturer: Milton Bradley

First released: 1990

Creator: Robert B Fuhrer

While electronic toys from Japan would revolutionise the toy market in the mid to late '90s, the early part of the decade still belonged to more classic board-game designs. One such creation proved to be one of the wackiest ideas ever (and one that's still a popular choice today), and it just so happened to include a set of pliers and one temperamental crocodile with a sore tooth.

Designed by inventor Robert B Fuhrer in the late '80s, the original version of what came to be known as Crocodile Dentist went through a number of changes. The classic 'lunging' motion the game became so well known for was originally removed, as it was thought it might scare young players and put them off the game entirely. Fuhrer was also forced to add a set of plastic pliers for players to use when removing teeth (you were originally just meant to use your fingers). However, following later playtests, Fuhrer decided to phase the lunging motion back in. And so a board-game classic was born.

Launched in 1990, Crocodile Dentist would go on to be one of the most sought-after toys during Christmas 1991 (a mighty feat considering this was during the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle* heyday and the same year as the launch of the Sega Mega Drive/Genesis games console). It remained a big seller for years afterwards, and you can still get a more modern version of it today. And, yes, it still lunges!

▶ A travel version of Crocodile Dentist was also produced in 1993, following the success of the larger home version. Rather than using pliers to remove teeth, this version required you to push each tooth down until you found the sore one and made its jaw clamp down playfully.

The Legacy

American board game publisher Winning Moves and toy giant Hasbro eventually acquired the rights to Crocodile Dentist, seeing the game through a number of iterations right through into 2018. The modern version of the game dropped the use of plastic pliers and instead opts for the pushing down teeth method used for the '90s pocket version. Much like Buckaroo before it, Crocodile Dentist has become one of those enduring mainstays in the family board game market.



CROCODILE DENTIST

“The classic ‘lunging’ motion the game became so well known for was originally removed, as it was thought it might scare young players and put them off the game”

▲ The game was involved in a famous blooper on the American version of *The Price is Right*. Back in 1993, the travel version was used as one of the prizes that contestants could win. Host Bob Barker yelped in fright when the miniature croc clamped its mouth down on his unsuspecting digit.

▲ The success of Crocodile Dentist saw creator Robert B Fuhrer continue the crocodilian theme with the release of Gator Golf in 1994. The idea of the game was to navigate a golf course set inside the mouth of a motorised alligator. It also got a reboot and was re-released back in 2008.

▲ While Operation, Hungry Hungry Hippos, Mouse Trap and Buckeroo were the hits that dominated the board game market in the '60s and '70s, it would be the likes of Crocodile Dentist and Bop It that would define the market in the '90s.

BEAVIS AND BUTT-HEAD

Information

Directed by: Mike Judge

First shown: 1992

Number of seasons: 8

Some viewers couldn't get past the laughter: the incessant "heh, heh, hehs" of two of the most socially incompetent, sex-obsessed, teenage delinquents to have ever graced our television screens. But whether they were getting into scuzzy self-made scrapes or passing their judgement on myriad music videos while plonked square-eyed on a couch, Beavis and Butt-Head's penchant for boobs, violence, mayhem and heavy metal proved hugely influential.

Whether that was cool or totally sucked seemed to depend – to a degree – on age. For the young viewers of Generation X, Mike Judge's jabbering duo were supremely

brave, if not without controversy. They made their debut in a cartoon short called *Frog Baseball* in 1992 – with Beavis throwing amphibians for Butt-Head to splat. Its success led to MTV commissioning a host of episodes, and the series ended up airing between 1993 and 1997.

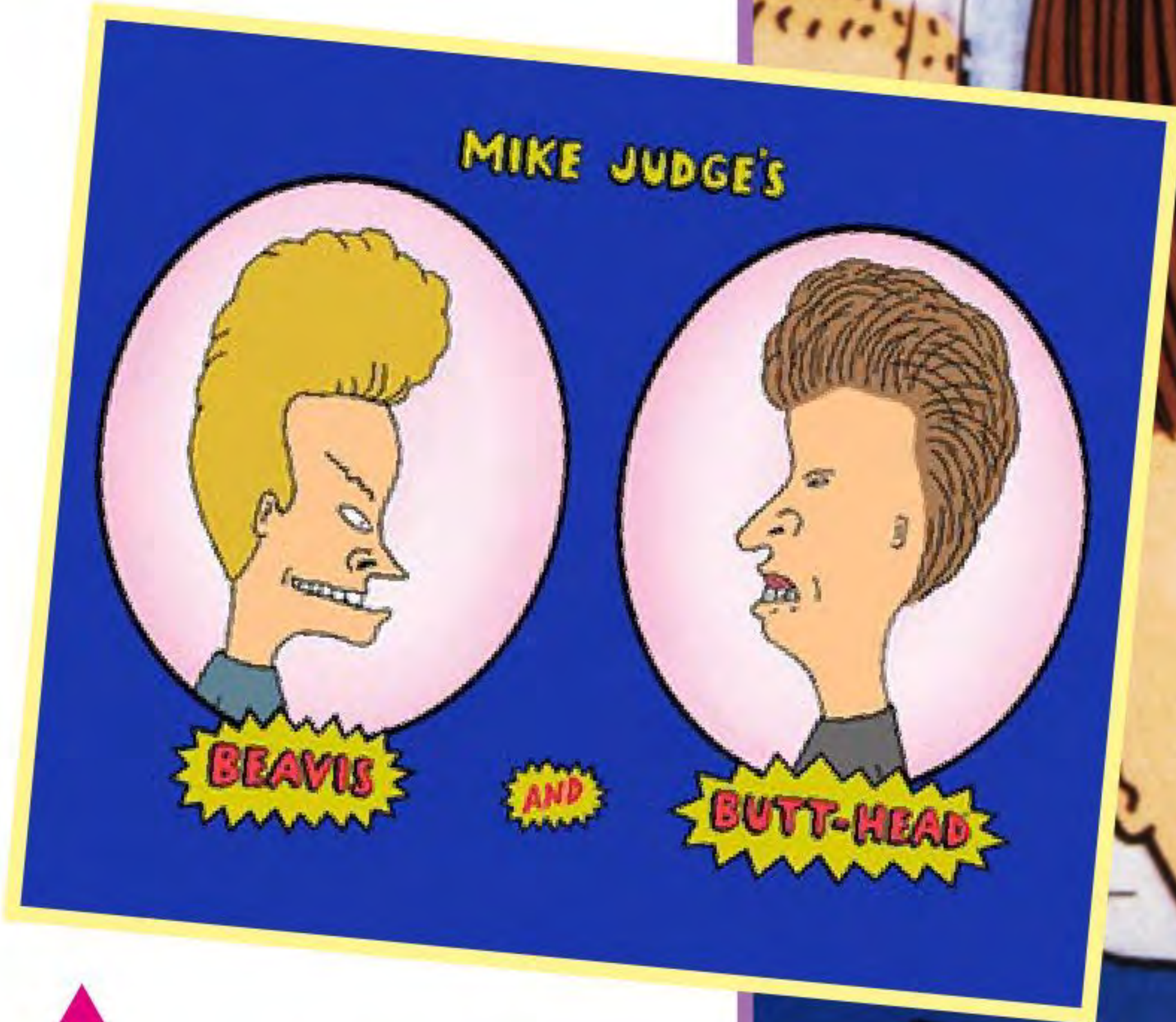
The first season was so successful that it had to be halted soon after it premiered because Judge and his team couldn't keep up with the demand. But as time went on, a world was built around the bewildered pair. Viewers would see the ninth-graders' workplace (Burger World) and Highland High School along with Principal McVicker, hippie teacher David Van Driessen and

neighbour Tom Anderson. There were also catchphrases aplenty, albeit from 'butt-munch' to 'dill-weeds'.

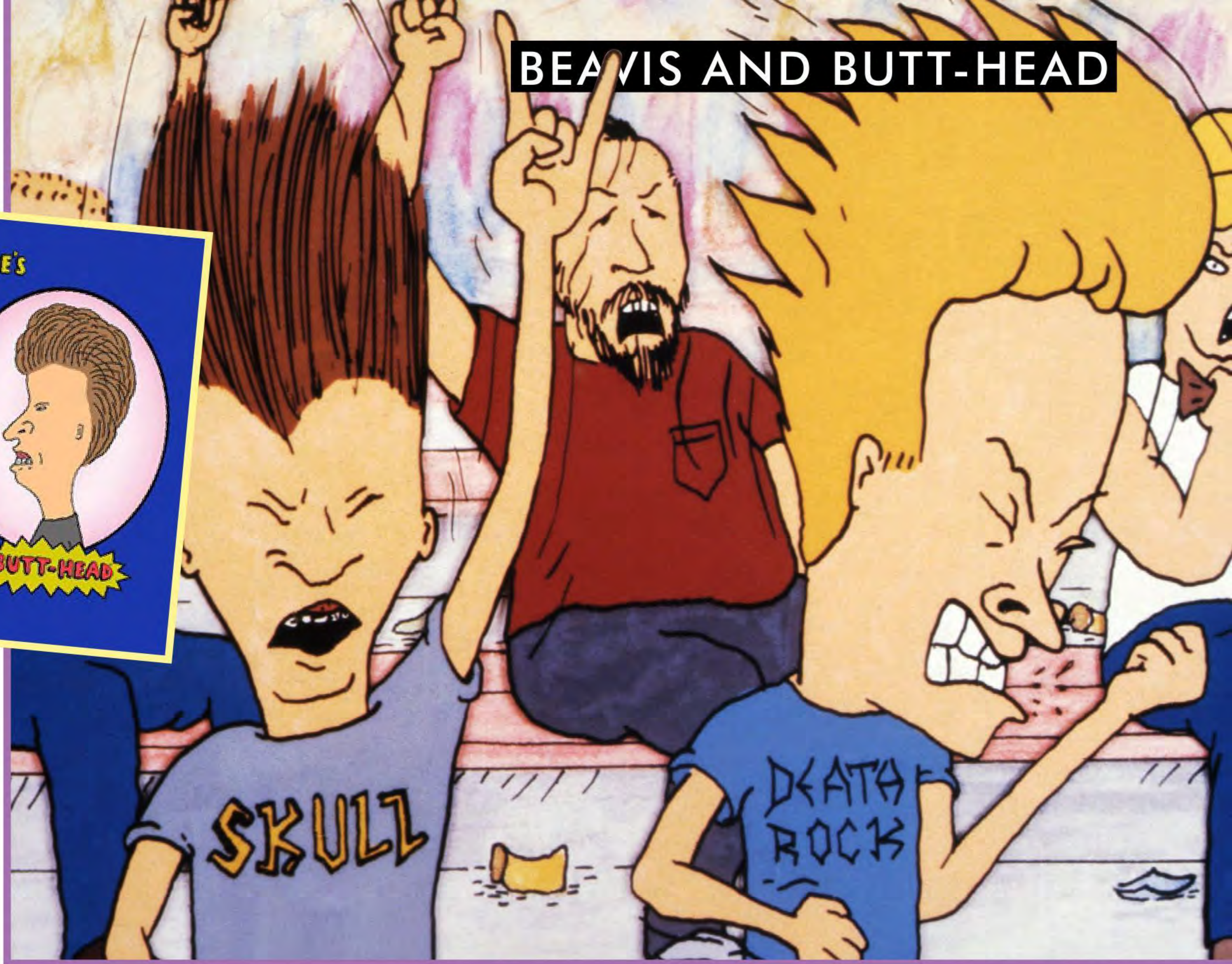
Some proved too much for MTV. Fire references were banned, and the show bumped back to 10.30pm when Beavis' penchant for flames was blamed for a five-year-old setting fire to his home, killing his sister. The innuendo and scatological humour also caught the attention of Senator Ernest Hollings, who inadvertently labelled the under-educated outsiders 'Buffcoat and Beaver'. Mispronouncing their names then became a running gag, with the overall show proving so memorable that it returned for one more series in 2011.



BEAVIS AND BUTT-HEAD



Both Beavis and Butt-Head were voiced by the series' creator, writer and director Mike Judge, who spent his early career in Silicon Valley working for tech startups and touring in a blues band. He would improvise a lot of the comments made by the feckless pair as they sat and watched music videos.



"The first season was so successful that it had to be halted soon after it premiered because Judge and his team couldn't keep up with the demand"

Beavis was given a pronounced underbite and obsessive stare while Butt-Head had receding gums. Judge says he based these on the facial characteristics of his school friends and neighbours. He also named Beavis after a friend from college called Bobby Beavis, and Butt-Head from a kid who had the same nickname.

©Alamy: Thinkstock

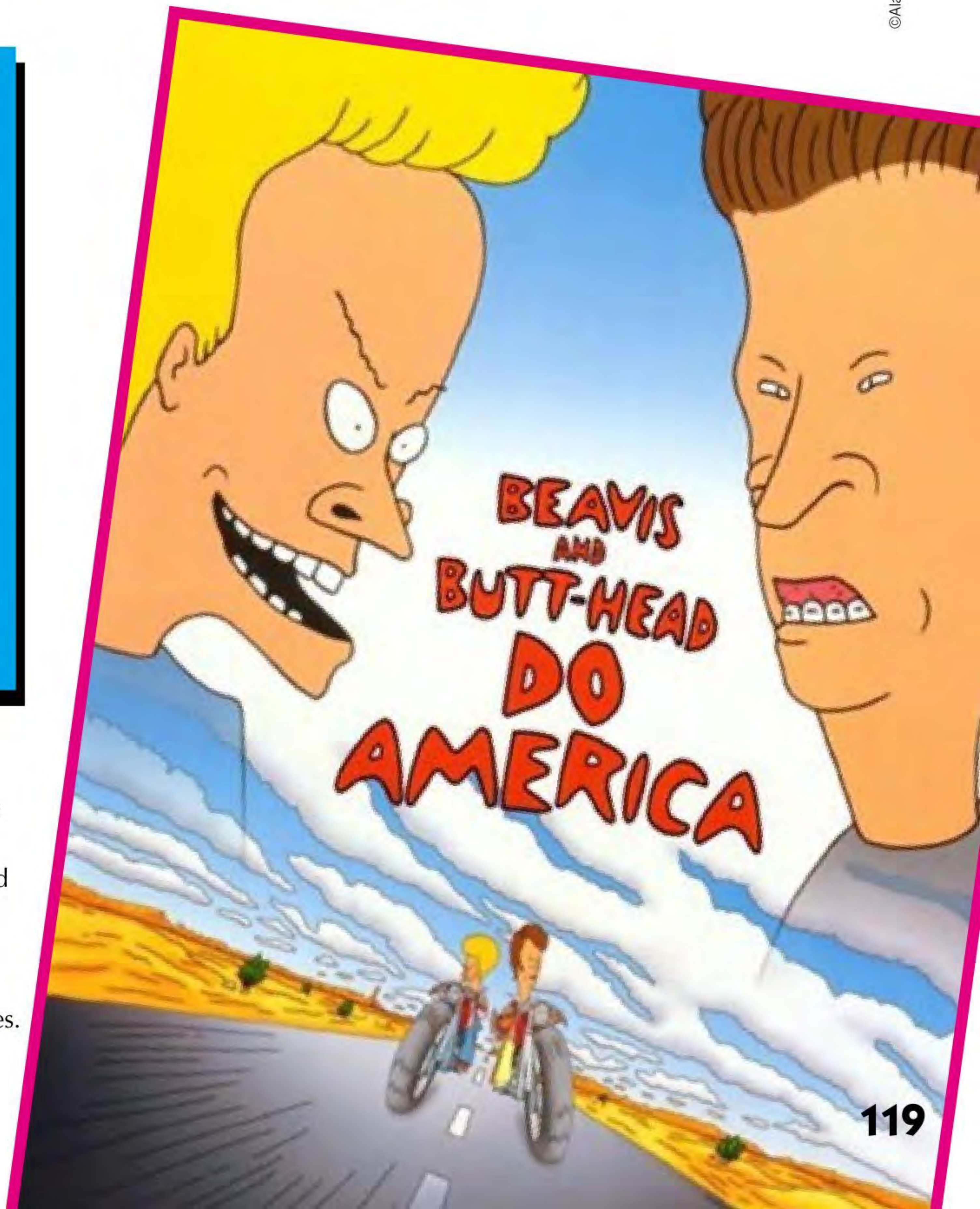
As well as fostering a violent, sadistic relationship with Butt-Head, Beavis would transform into Cornholio after consuming caffeine, sugary food or pain-relief tablets. With his shirt over the top of his head and his arms raised, he would wander around screaming: "I am the Great Cornholio, I need TP for my bunghole."



The Legacy

Beavis and Butt-Head had a major influence on television comedy and animation. Mike Judge went on to create *King of the Hill* in 1998, and the *Beavis and Butt-Head* character Daria appeared in a spin-off animated sitcom of her own. Meanwhile, *South Park* creators Matt Stone and Trey Parker say their show was influenced by *Beavis and Butt-Head*. There has been much talk of a movie sequel and live-action film, but both have yet to get off the ground.

In 1996, the characters starred in a hilarious feature film called *Beavis and Butt-Head Do America*. Stripped of music videos, it involved the sex-starved pair inadvertently and excitedly agreeing to kill the wife of a gangster, having misinterpreted the instruction to 'do' her. It grossed \$63 million in the US, and got a 72 per cent rating on Rotten Tomatoes.



SAVED BY THE BELL

When the students of Bayside lit up the small screen in 1989 with their high-school high jinks and comedy adventures, there was a sense of familiarity for many viewers. After all, actors Mark-Paul Gosselaar, Dustin Diamond, Lark Voorhies and Dennis Haskins had appeared together on a previous show called *Good Morning, Miss Bliss*. But it was the hit US kids' sitcom *Saved by the Bell* that made household names of their characters, Zack Morris, Samuel 'Screech' Powers, Lisa Turtle, and the beloved principal Mr Richard Belding.

Disney had decided not to recommission *Good Morning, Miss Bliss*, so NBC stepped in, axing all but the aforementioned four, and bolstering them with Zack's love interest, Kelly Kapowski (played by the all-American gal Tiffani-Amber Thiessen); the strong, perm-haired, feminist brainbox Jessie Spano (played by the talented actress Elizabeth

Berkley); and the token jock AC Slater (played by Mario Lopez). Together, they embarked on a four-season run spanning 86 episodes, covering mostly light-hearted topics and the ups and downs of high-school life, but sometimes looking at issues such as homelessness and drug use.

Created by Sam Bobrick, who had written for *Bewitched* and *The Flintstones*, and filmed before a live studio audience, *Saved by the Bell*'s action also took place at the cafe hangout, The Max. Typically, Zack would set up a prank or get involved in an extreme situation that he needed to get out of, while Screech would be his bumbling partner in crime. Slater would vie with 'preppy' Zack for Kelly's attention, while much-teased Screech would seek Lisa's love. Jessie, Zack's neighbour, was the studious girl who had an on-off relationship with Slater. The chemistry between all of them worked so well.

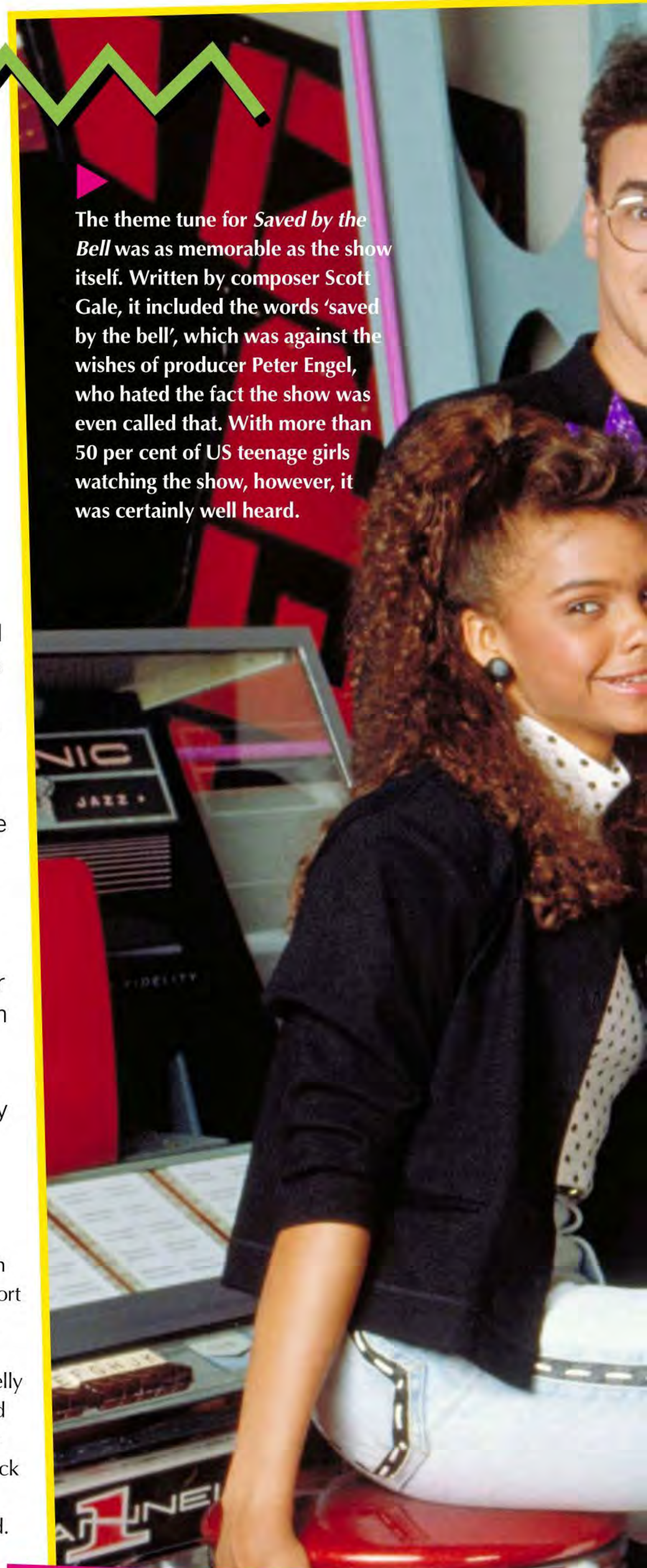
In 1992, *Saved by the Bell* spawned the feature-length TV film *Hawaiian Style*, which involved the six students trying to save a resort owned by Kelly's grandfather from a greedy developer. A follow-up series, *The College Years*, then saw Zack, Slater, Screech and Kelly head to California University, and this led to *Wedding in Las Vegas*, in which Zack and Kelly became engaged.

The Legacy

Saved by the Bell was so popular, NBC sought to keep it going after the original teenage cast members left. This led to *Saved by the Bell: The New Class*, with Dennis Haskins continuing as Mr Belding, and Dustin Diamond's Screech later becoming his administrative assistant. The series ran from 1993 to 2000 with a revolving cast, but it was never as popular as the original. *Bayside! The Musical!*, however, includes the original characters, and it has enjoyed a stage run since 2013.

One of the most popular characters, Screech, was the ultimate high-school dork, yet he could so easily have been denied the part. Unknown to producer Peter Engel at the time, Dustin Diamond was aged just 12 when he was cast, making him a couple of years younger than the other actors.

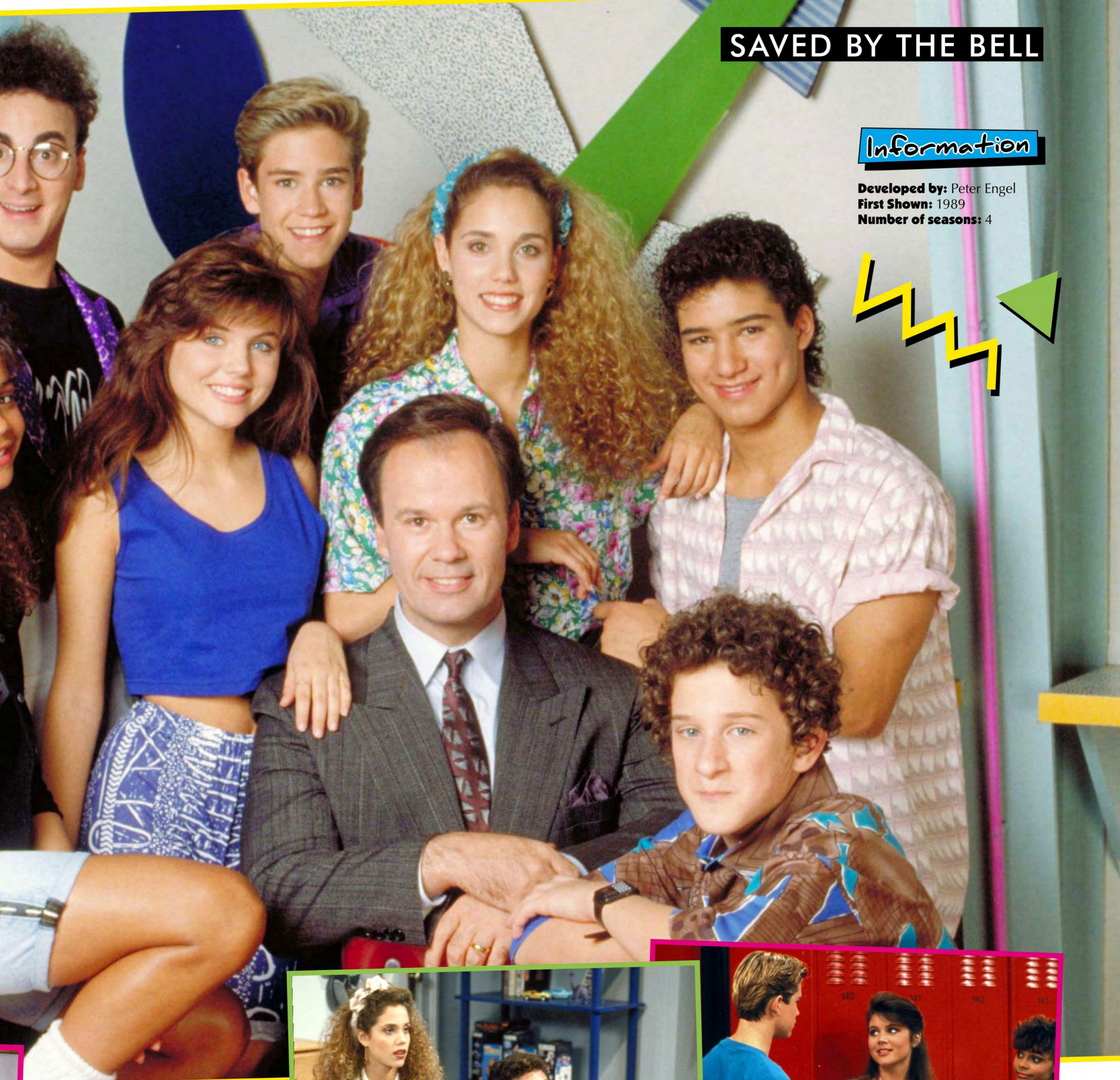
The theme tune for *Saved by the Bell* was as memorable as the show itself. Written by composer Scott Gale, it included the words 'saved by the bell', which was against the wishes of producer Peter Engel, who hated the fact the show was even called that. With more than 50 per cent of US teenage girls watching the show, however, it was certainly well heard.



SAVED BY THE BELL

Information

Developed by: Peter Engel
First Shown: 1989
Number of seasons: 4



► *Saved by the Bell* tended to be a colourful, light-hearted affair. But in episode nine of season two, Jessie Spano (Elizabeth Berkley) turned to caffeine pills to cope with her midterm exams and ended up freaking out in front of Zack. In one of the most memorable scenes of the show, Jessie began singing *I'm So Excited*, before breaking down, scared.



MINIDISC

It's hard to imagine life before the iPod, but back in 1992, Sony's answer to digital data storage for the home market was the MiniDisc. The technology was used in portable players, home stereos and as a file storage medium.

With an appearance that resembled a floppy disc and tiny CD combined, the MiniDisc was a magneto-optical, disc-based data storage format. It first launched with a capacity to hold 60 minutes of compressed audio, which was later increased to 74 and then again to 80 minutes.

Sony marketed the MiniDisc as a higher-quality alternative to cassette tapes due to its rewriting functionality. What was also great about it was its ability to buffer music for six to ten seconds: it meant that your tunes were far less likely to skip when on the move – a

feature that portable CD players just could not offer.

At the time of launch, CDs hadn't yet become recordable, so MiniDisc offered great scope for creating customised playlists and backup copies; however, the initial recommended retail price of players was high – around \$700/£550 – which meant that many music fans were unable to afford it at first. RRP's did lower in the late '90s, but Sony faced tough competition when the prices of blank CD-Rs fell sharply.

MiniDisc was popular in Japan, and achieved moderate success in Europe, but US sales were low throughout its life. The launch of the iPod in 2001 meant that much of its anti-skip and rewriting appeal was lost to the new MP3 format. The last of Sony's MiniDisc players were sold by March 2013.

Unfortunately, the MiniDisc player/recorder cost \$750 at launch, meaning it was unaffordable for most younger music fans at that time. Thankfully, lower-priced systems were launched at around \$250 in 1998.

What was brilliant about the portable MiniDisc player was its shock-absorbing mechanism: unlike the Discmans at the time, your music didn't skip if you accidentally knocked the player while out and about.

The Legacy

Sony's portable MiniDisc player offered skip-free music on the move, so in that sense it very much helped to pave the way for MP3 players, such as Apple's iPod. Features such as a rechargeable battery, visible track listings and volume control on the headphone attachment became standard fixtures of portable music players.



The first ever MiniDisc portable player weighed a whopping 700 grams and only had a 75-minute battery life.

Information

Manufacturer: Sony
First released: 1992
Expect to pay: £50



The idea for the MiniDisc was actually introduced in 1984 at the annual Audio Engineering Society Convention by Kees Schouhamer Immink and Joseph Braat.

BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER

The mid to late '90s may have been the era of the true summer blockbuster, but it was a decade when television once again came into its own, driven by a slew of sci-fi and fantasy shows. *Star Trek* continued its success with *The Next Generation*, *DS9* and *Voyager*; *Babylon 5* fought a different intergalactic war; *Sliders* travelled between parallel dimensions; and *The X-Files* explored the weird and unexplained. And, in amid that small-screen phantasmagoria, was a little show based on a forgettable teen movie from 1992.

Joss Whedon, who had written the original script for that very film, returned in 1997 with a version that was far darker and more multi-layered. Premiering in the spring, it proved an instant ratings smash for the WB Television Network, and that popularity soon went global. It's not difficult to see why. While its practical effects and special effects – especially in the first few seasons – haven't aged well, its writing and performances have rightly earned it a status as immortal as its titular monsters.

Part horror, part fantasy and part human drama, it managed to capture the transformation and emotional upheaval of our teenage years while still playing host to vampires, ghosts, demons and countless other otherworldly creatures. It made household names out of stars Sarah Michelle Gellar, David Boreanaz and Alyson Hannigan, and launched countless other careers both in front and behind the camera. Some might say the '90s was the time of Ross and Rachel, but no one even came close to the unforgettable romance of Buffy Summers and Angel. Some things just live forever...

Information

Creators: Joss Whedon
First released: 10 March 1997
Number of seasons: 7

During the audition process, stars including Selma Blair and Katie Holmes (who would go on to star in *Dawson's Creek*) auditioned to play the titular slayer. Charisma Carpenter also originally auditioned for the part of Buffy, but was instead cast as the preppy Cordelia. Sarah Michelle Gellar actually auditioned for Cordelia before nabbing the star role.



Enduring villain-turned-antihero, Spike could have had a southern drawl if actor James Masters had had his way in the auditioning process. The producers instead opted for a British accent, with Anthony Stewart Head (who played Giles) coaching Masters on his best cockney impersonation.

Joss Whedon did indeed write the script for the original 1992 film, but eventually parted ways with the studio behind it midway through production. Whedon stated the change in the film's tone, a removal of some key scenes, and star Donald Sutherland's ad-libbing as some of the main issues.



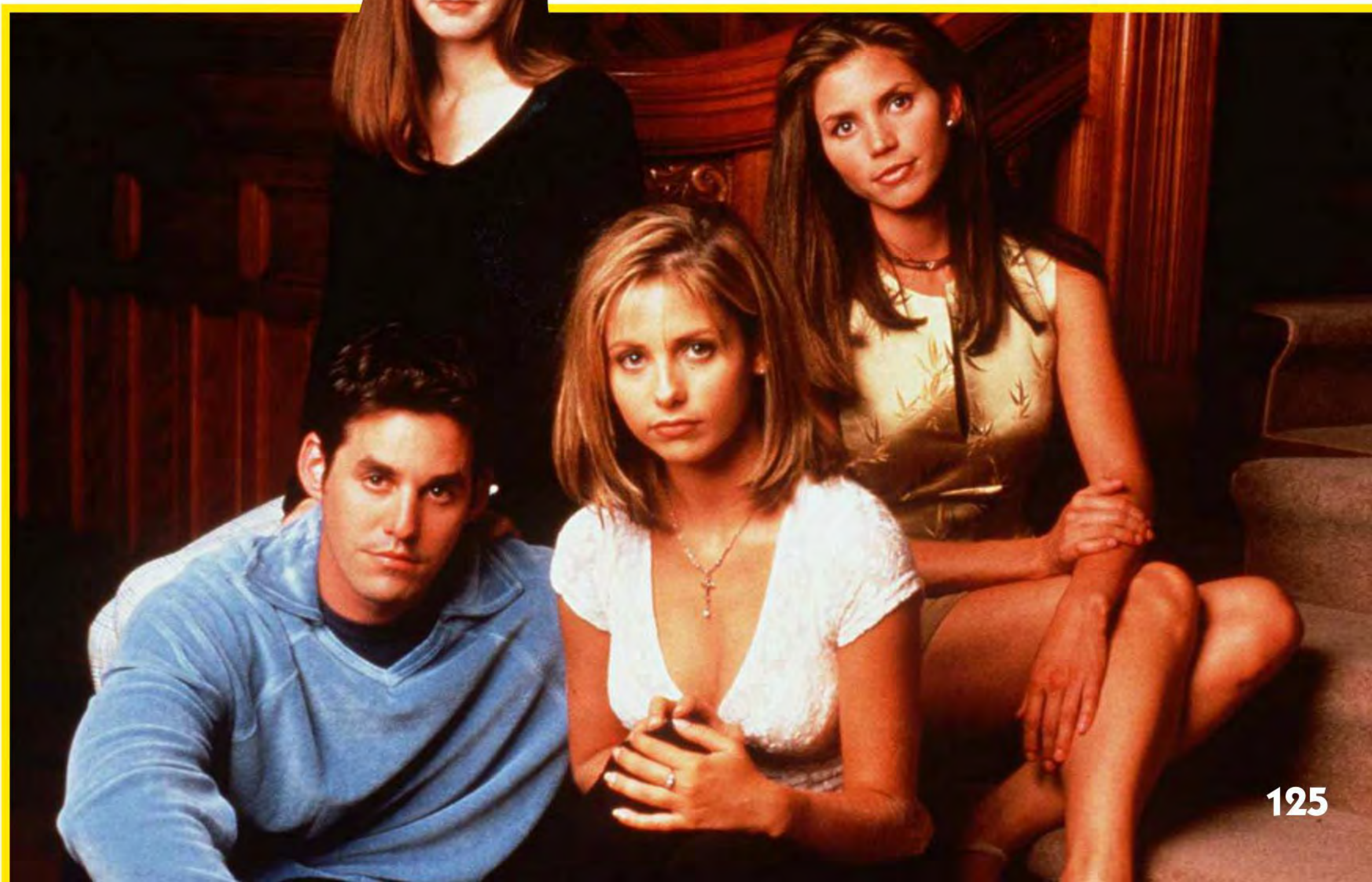
The Legacy

While *Buffy's* quality may have started to dip towards the end of its seven-season-long run, it managed to spawn countless tie-ins including games, novels, comics and more. It also, famously, produced a spin-off show in *Angel*, which holds just as much affection for long-serving fans of the 'Buffyverse'. Creator Joss Whedon would go on to create the much-loved (and short-lived) *Firefly*, and eventually write/direct two *Avengers* films, as well as 2017's *Justice League*. Most of its major stars would go on to have long careers in TV and film, but *Buffy* will always remain their centre.

Despite playing a character famed for slaying creatures that rise from the grave, Sarah Michelle Gellar had a real-life fear of cemeteries. She burst into tears during a scene where she had to be buried alive, so the producers eventually built a fake one on set for use in future episodes.



© Getty; Alamy



GOOSEBUMPS

When RL Stine sat down to pen the very first *Goosebumps* book, *Welcome to Dead House*, back in 1992, nobody (including his hopeful publisher) had any idea what a pop-culture craze the unassuming middle-grade horror series would eventually become. Born out of a suggestion from Stine's wife and editor, Jane, as a follow-up to his recently successful line of *Fear Street* teen novels, *Goosebumps* began its meteoric rise with a humble two-book launch – *Stay Out of the Basement* rounded out the duo – and a virtually nonexistent marketing campaign.

The series' unexpected popularity slowly expanded over the next several years through, as Stine likes to put it, a kind of underground word-of-mouth kid network. Classics like *Say Cheese and Die!*, *The Scarecrow Walks at Midnight*, *Welcome to Camp Nightmare*, *Deep Trouble*, *Monster Blood*, *One Day at HorrorLand* and *Night of the Living Dummy* kept young readers hooked and turning pages. By 1994-95, Scholastic was selling over four million *Goosebumps* books a month, resulting in the creepy stories getting translated into 28 different languages.

The ubiquitous franchise spawned a campy TV show, collectible trading cards, a choose-your-own-adventure spinoff (*Give Yourself Goosebumps*), a fan club, a Milton Bradley board game, and even weird tie-ins such as spooky scissors and sticky 'ghost-it' notes. Unsurprisingly, countless imitation book series cropped up in order to cash in on the literary craze; knock-offs such as *Gooflumps*, *Bone Chillers*, *Spinetingers*, *Deadtime Stories* and the notably excellent *Strange Matter*. However, with its signature blend of humour and horror, *Goosebumps* will always be the pioneer that started the kiddie horror revolution.

Information

Publisher: Parachute Press/Scholastic

First released: 1992

Expect to pay: £3-10 per book

▶ In the early '90s, RL Stine was pumping out one *Goosebumps* book every single month. Ghostwriting rumours circulated for years in response to the intense publishing schedule, though Stine confirmed that while there was outside help on a few basic outlines, he indeed wrote all 62 main entries in the original series.

The Legacy

While it doesn't generate nearly the fevered demand it did in the early '90s, *Goosebumps* is still enduring today. After the original 62-entry series ended, RL Stine kept the terror train rolling via continuations like *Goosebumps 2000*, *Goosebumps HorrorLand*, and most recently, *Goosebumps SlappyWorld*. Arguably late but fun nonetheless, a feature film based on the books starring Jack Black as a fictional Stine, was released in 2015. A sequel is currently in the works.



While *Goosebumps* seems like the perfect name for everyone's favourite nostalgic book series, its origin is rather happenstance. Early on, Stine was flipping through an issue of *TV Guide* and saw an ad listing that stated 'It's Goosebumps Week on Channel 11!'. The rest, as they say, is horror history.

New Jersey-based artist Tim Jacobus was the brilliant talent behind most of the original *Goosebumps* covers. With a combination of traditional paint and airbrushing, he created iconic imagery that perfectly conveyed Stine's suburban horror tone. Arguably, it was instrumental in catapulting Scholastic's book series into the stratosphere.



"The series' unexpected popularity slowly expanded through a kind of underground word-of-mouth kid network"

No matter how hard you look, you'll never find divorce, sex, abuse or death in a *Goosebumps* book. Truthfully, that's all by design. From the series inception, RL Stine purposely kept any sordid, real-world situations out of his stories, because he wanted kids to feel like they were on a rollercoaster: scared but safe.

Information

Creators: Darren Star, Aaron Spelling and E Duke Vincent
First released: 4 October 1997
Number of episodes: 293



BEVERLY HILLS, 90210

Long before teen dramas and teen comedies took over the big screen in the early 2000s, one TV show brought young angst and the transformative time of high school to life like no other. Broadcast from 1990 to 2000, *Beverly Hills, 90210* set the blueprint for all the big teen-based shows that followed, from *Dawson's Creek* to *The OC*. It even got a soft reboot in 2008, but this new iteration was a far cry from the trailblazer that was its original.

Sure, it did have cast members that were far too old to play students attending high school (those wrinkles and receding hairlines look even more cringe-worthy today), but it really did break the mould when it came to portraying some incredibly taboo subjects on prime-time US TV. It openly portrayed sexual awakening, but also dealt with rape and teenage pregnancy. It tackled domestic violence, homophobia and racism, and even had storylines involving teenage suicide and

AIDS. It looks cheesy to 21st century eyes, but at the time, it shed light on issues few programmes would even consider.

The show also made a household name of many of its stars (even if some lost their place in the zeitgeist after the show). It put Jason Priestley and Luke Perry on many a bedroom wall in poster form, and was a launch pad for Shannen Doherty (who went on to star in fantasy series *Charmed*) and Hilary Swank (who went on to win two Academy Awards).



▲ The show was conceived under the working title *Class of Beverly Hills*, and was initially planned to be an issue-based show that dealt with a different theme each episode. However, the decision was eventually made to make it a teen drama with multiple story arcs that dealt with myriad taboo teen problems.



▲ Torrance High School in Torrance, Los Angeles was used as a double for Beverly Hills High School throughout the series' decade-long run. Interestingly, this wasn't the only show using it as a shooting location. It was also used to bring Sunnydale High School to life in fellow '90s hit TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

The Legacy

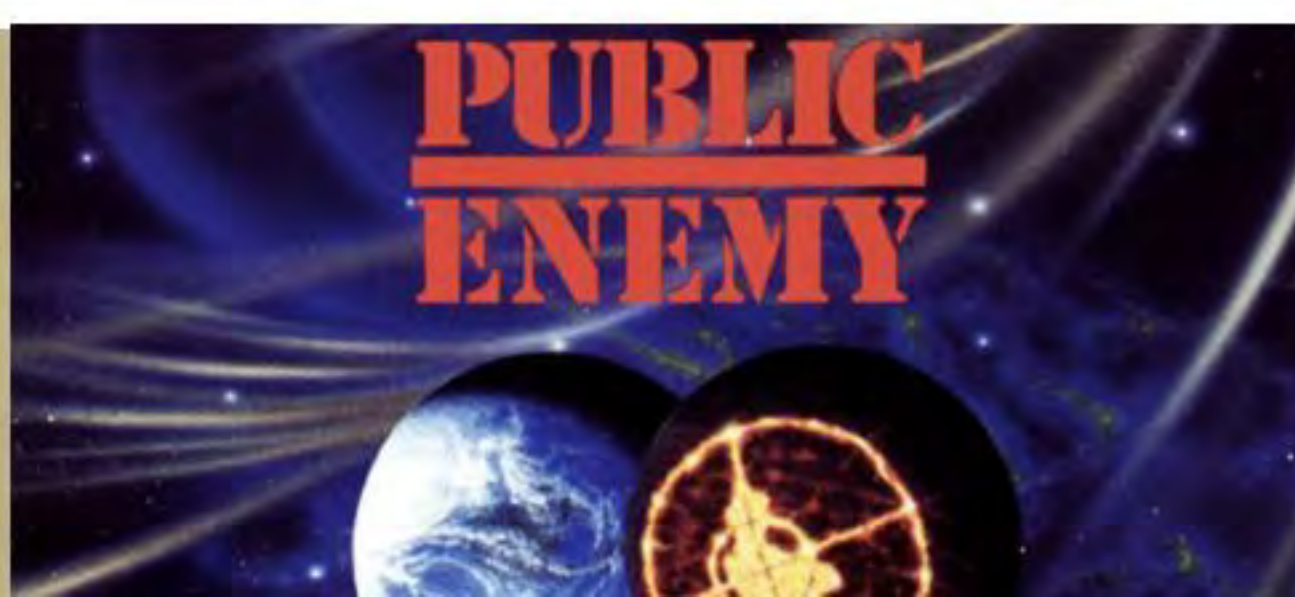
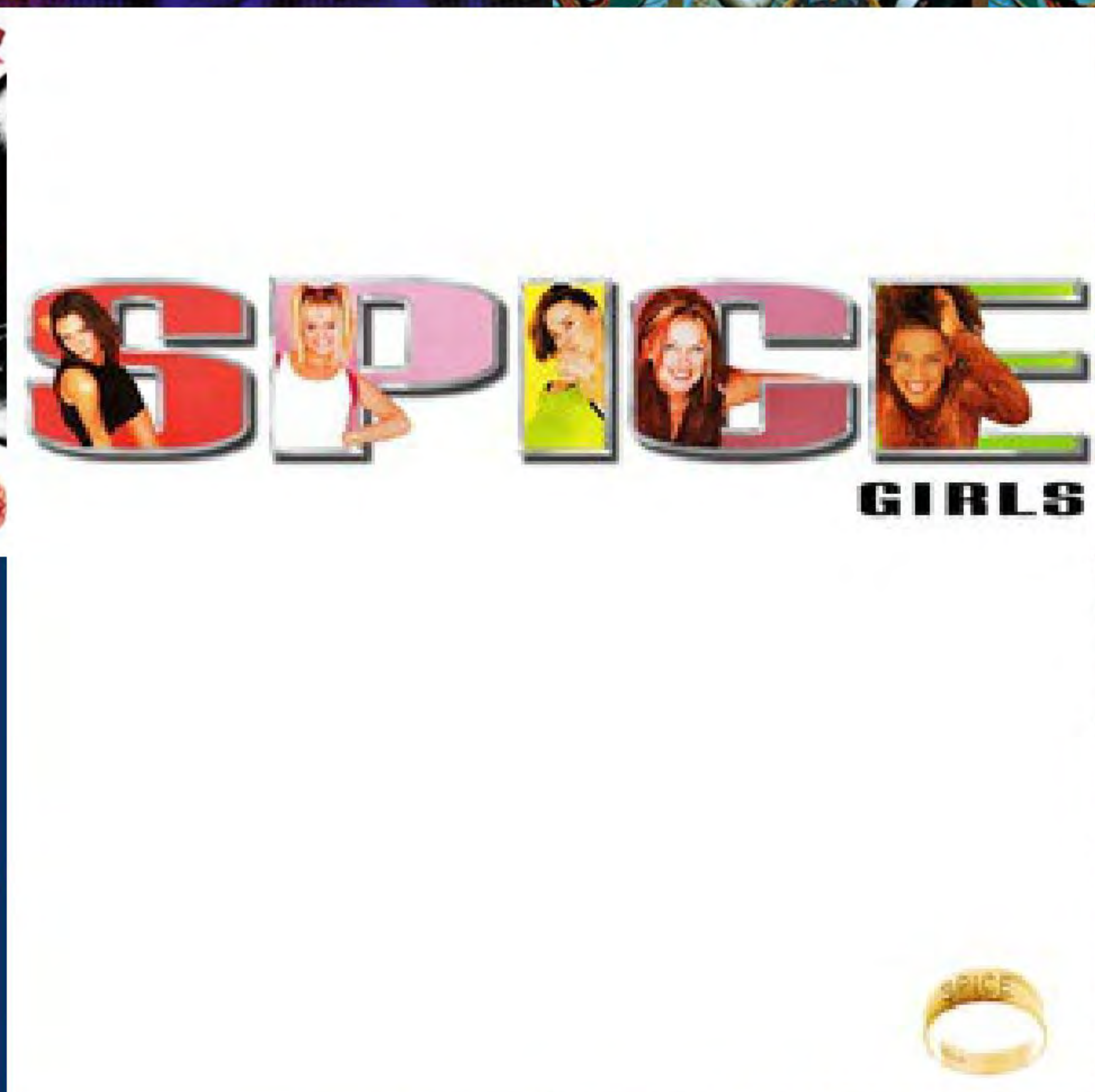
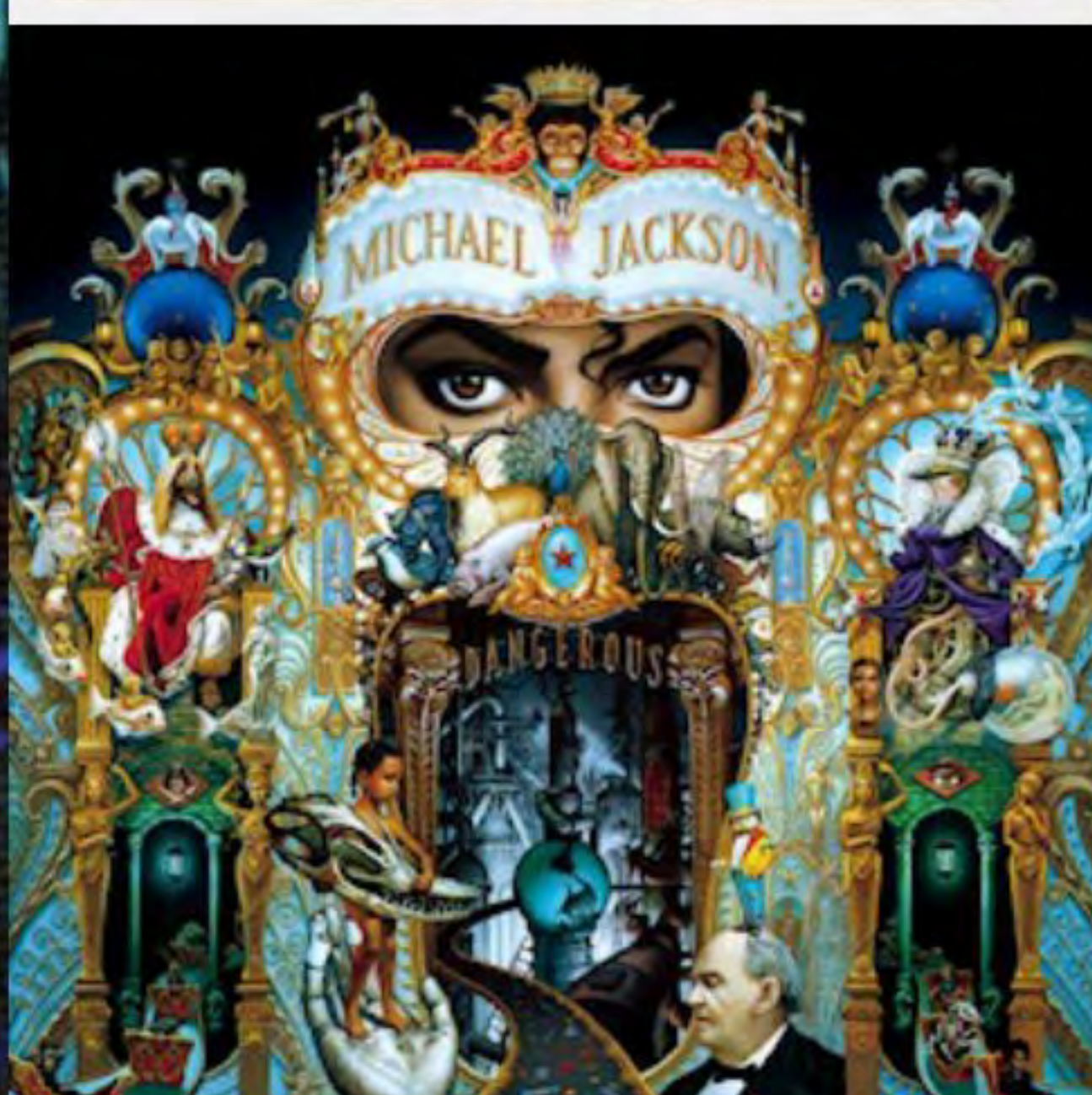
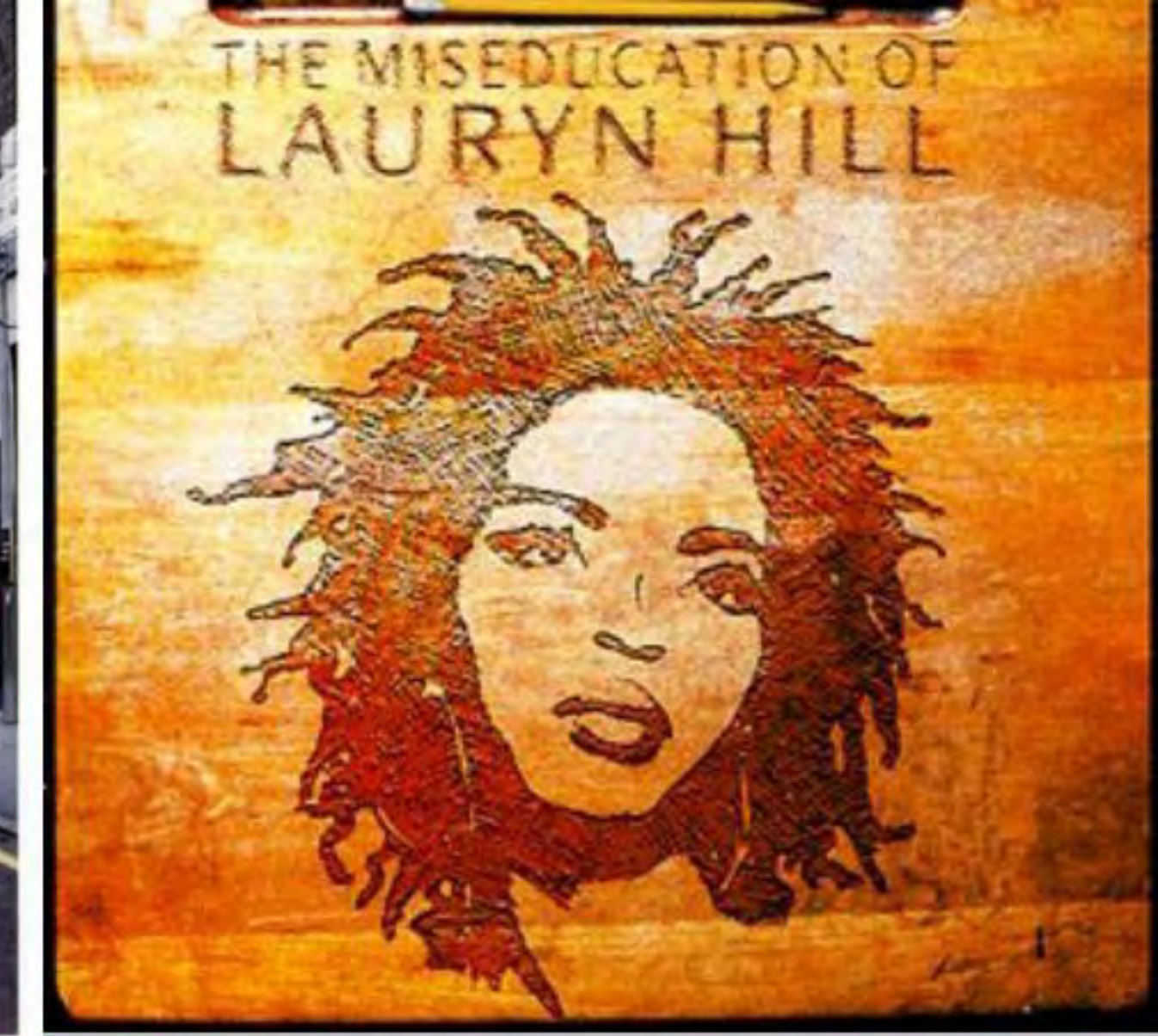
In 2008, a soft reboot of the series – using its original premise of a family moving to Los Angeles from out of state – premiered on The CW network in North America. In this version, a family from Kansas moves to Hollywood to be with their alcoholic grandmother, with Jennie Garth, Shannen Doherty and Tori Spelling reprising their roles as Kelly Taylor, Brenda Walsh and Donna Martin, respectively. It ran for five seasons until May 2013.

▲ Alongside all the special episodes that aired during its ten-year run, *Beverly Hills, 90210* also returned with a number of one-off instalments, including *Beverly Hills, 90210: The Final Goodbye* in 2000, *Beverly Hills, 90210: 10 Year High School Reunion* in 2003 and *Beverly Hills, 90210: Fox 25th Anniversary Special* in 2012.



▲ A number of characters from *Beverly Hills, 90210* made regular cameo appearances in *Melrose Place* – another memorable drama from the '90s – including Jennie Garth, Tori Spelling, Brian Austin Green and Ian Ziering.





THE SOUNDS OF THE '90s

Moving away from the glitz and glamour of the 1980s, music became angst-ridden and more reflective of society

Doc Martens. Parkas. Dungarees. In the 1990s, your choice of clothes may well have reflected your taste in music. Certainly, in Britain at least, preferences appeared to be mainly split across grunge, Britpop, hip-hop and straight-out pop, all with their different outlooks both physically and mentally. As such, it was a decade of both evolution and revolution – one in which the glitz of the megastars, from Michael Jackson to Madonna, largely gave way to more down-at-heel appeal.

But then music had a void to fill as the decade got underway. The baggy Madchester era was drawing to a close (with

The Stone Roses amazing crowds on a man-made island in the Mersey estuary on 27 May 1990), just as the recession was about to bite and people were yearning for something new and identifiable.

At first, the Americans invaded, Nirvana helping to drag grunge from Seattle and California to an appreciative, socially conscious worldwide audience. The golden age of hip-hop also continued from the 1980s, flourishing with artists such as Dr Dre and Snoop Doggy Dogg. But while British and Irish boybands took great influence from the Boston five that was New Kids on the Block (leading to numerous young vocal groups

from Take That and East 17 to Boyzone and Westlife), there was also a backlash.

Oasis emerged and stunned with *Live Forever* that was an antidote to Nirvana's *I Hate Myself and Want to Die*, as Noel Gallagher later put it. Indeed, guitar bands flourished to a backdrop of *Loaded* magazine and Fantasy Football, sparking Britpop and a humongous battle of two particular bands, split down class and geographical lines. The decade also saw the rise of the lad and ladette and the emergence of the Spice Girls, bringing Girl Power to the fore. Few opted to wear Geri Halliwell's Union Flag dress but the impact of the first all-girl pop group was enormous.

EVENTS



Death of Freddie Mercury

1991

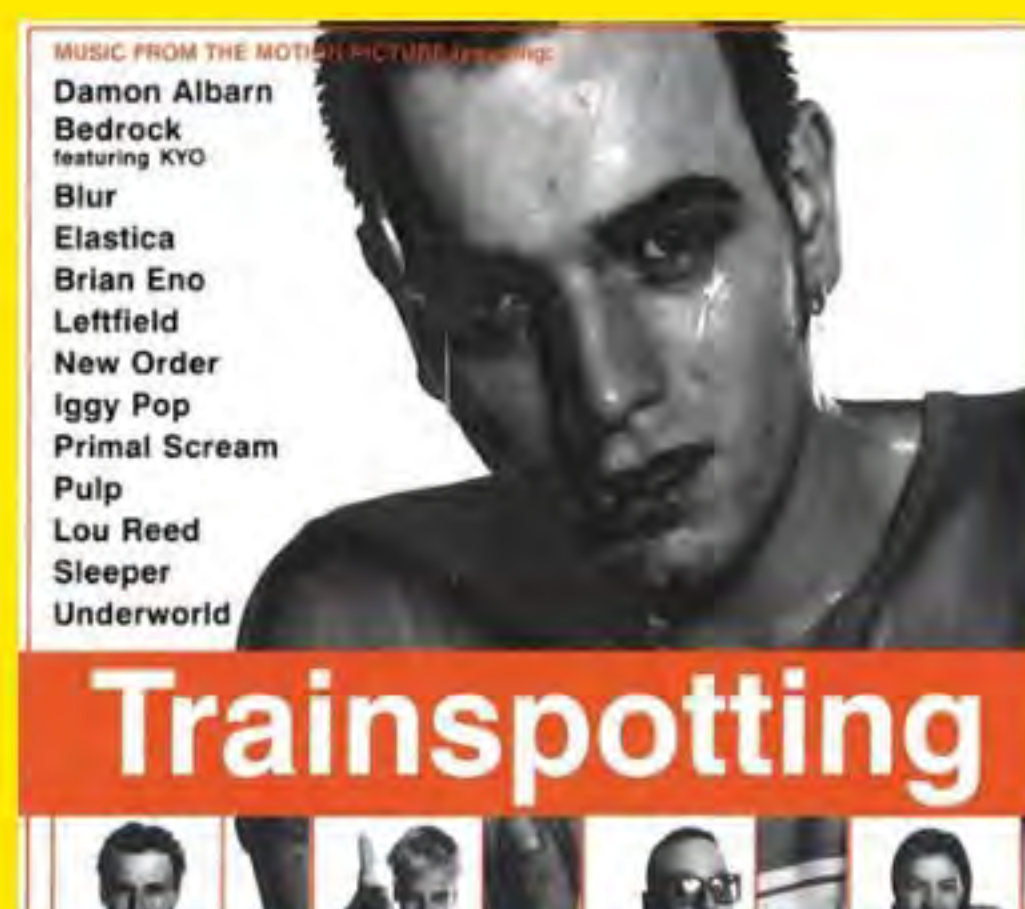
Just 24 hours after he confirmed he had been diagnosed with AIDS, Queen's extravagant lead singer, Freddie Mercury, died at the age of 45. He'd suffered bronchio-pneumonia as a result of his condition, and he was the first major rock star to die from the disease. The following year, the remaining members of the band – famous for hits such as *Bohemian Rhapsody* – organised The Freddie Mercury Tribute Concert for AIDS awareness, which took place at Wembley Stadium, London. A crowd of 72,000 attended.



Michael Jackson marries

1994

Michael Jackson signed a record-breaking \$65 million deal with Sony in March 1991, and his eighth album, *Dangerous*, went on to sell 30 million copies. But his reputation was battered over accusations of child sexual abuse in 1993 (the case was settled out of court), which meant his marriage to Lisa Marie Presley (daughter of Elvis) was a welcome, positive relief for fans. The pair appeared in Jackson's video for *You Are Not Alone* but they got divorced in 1996.



Trainspotting

1996

Right in the midst of Britpop, Manchester film director Danny Boyle helmed *Trainspotting*, a black comedy set in Edinburgh. It made a star of Ewan McGregor and was widely acclaimed but its soundtrack was also applauded for championing Britpop while placing techno-dance music on a par with rock. As such, bands including Sleeper, Blur, Pulp and Elastica rubbed shoulders with Underworld, Bedrock and Ice MC. Underworld's *Born Slippy .NUXX* became a hit on the back of the movie, selling a million.



Candle in the Wind

1997

Originally written in 1974 in honour of Marilyn Monroe, Elton John penned a new set of lyrics for *Candle in the Wind* following the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. Released as the B-side to *Something About the Way You Look Tonight*, the ballad struck a chord with the British public and it reached Number 1 in the charts of many countries across the world. Elton John also sang the song at Diana's funeral, describing the experience as "surreal."



Birth of Napster

1999

Set up by two teenagers, Napster struck fear into the heart of music industry executives who, for so long, had been watching the impact of the internet with some trepidation. The file-sharing application allowed people to download music from other people's computers, building up an enviable record collection of MP3s without even whiffing a traditional store or cluttering up space with anything as old fashioned as CDs. Napster eventually faded, but the idea didn't – as any music lover today will know.



BATTLE OF BRITPOP

It really, really did happen: the glorious soundtrack of the '90s was a heady mix of guitars and confidence

▲ Damon Albarn (second from left) lines up with his fellow Blur bandmates: Dave Rowntree, Alex James and Graham Coxon.

The Britpop era did not last very long, but as a musical movement, it beat the drum (and strummed the guitar) so very loud and proud. Some have claimed it was bookended by two albums of wildly differing quality: Blur's *Parklife* on 25 April 1994, and Oasis's *Be Here Now* in August 1997. But while those two bands were at the pinnacle of this pop-culture phenomenon, a huge explosion of new guitar bands ensured they were far from lonely.

ON STANDBY

Blur was first off the mark. The group released the single *Popscene* on 30 March 1992, and while it only peaked at Number 32 in the UK singles chart, it featured frontman Damon Albarn snottily delivering a petulant two-fingered assault on the derivative

tradition of contemporary pop. This was a time when British music was in the doldrums thanks to the rise of American grunge, spearheaded by Nirvana. Then Suede released their debut single, *The Drowners*, on 11 May. Again, it was certainly not a hit (charting at Number 49), but the musical seeds had been sown.

By April 1993, other British indie bands had also become prominent. Denim sought to revive the glam rock of the '70s, and Saint Etienne was emerging from the indie dance scene and riding close to the Top 10 with *You're in a Bad Way*, while Pulp – following years on the dole and a struggle for success during the '80s – had been getting a lot of radio airplay with *Babies* and *Razzmatazz*.

These three bands, together with The Auteurs and Suede, were lumped together

by the writers of *Select* magazine, with the latter's Brett Anderson making the publication's cover, flanked by the Union Flag. 'Yanks go home!' screamed the strap, alongside a reference to the 'Battle for Britain'. In that moment, a new movement was duly born.

Even so, it took a while before Britpop was a common phrase. That came after Blur released *Modern Life is Rubbish* on 10 May 1993, and after they introduced *Parklife* the following year. That latter release really did mark Britpop's imperial period, however, and when those cocky northern boys Oasis released the epic and era-defining *Definitely Maybe* on 29 August 1994, the doors opened and so began a tidal wave: Ash, Dodgy, Echobelly, Feeder, Gene, The Bluetones, Lush, Menswear, Kula Shaker, The



Oasis played a huge gig at Maine Road, the former home of its beloved Manchester City, in 1996, with Noel sporting his iconic Union Flag guitar.

Pulp's appearance at Glastonbury on the Other Stage in 1994 – alongside Oasis, Radiohead and Blur – was a wake-up call for the newcomers of the British pop scene, and rising indie star Jarvis Cocker dazzled.



5 ESSENTIAL '90s BRITPOP ALBUMS



(What's the Story) Morning Glory?

Oasis

1995

Noel Gallagher reckons *Definitely Maybe* beats *Morning Glory*, and he's not wrong. But, as indebted as it is to The Beatles, this album came at Oasis's peak: at a time when even its B-sides were becoming acclaimed classics. *Wonderwall*, *Hey Now!*, *Don't Look Back in Anger*, *Cast No Shadow*, *Champagne Supernova*... shall we go on?



Different Class

Pulp

1995

This undoubted masterpiece was defiant and edgy, showcasing Jarvis Cocker's extraordinary lyrical ability after so many years in the wilderness. Sharp wit complemented dazzling melodies in the establishment-baiting *Common People*, while the minutely detailed narrative of *Underwear* had listeners on tenterhooks. An album high on revenge, hedonism and twisted fantasy.



Parklife

Blur

1994

As quintessentially British as they come and sung with an accentuated southern accent, this album might not flow easily from one song to the next, but it is whimsical, experimental and packed with references to life in the 1990s. Full on, as with *Girls & Boys*, and reflective of future troubles (*End of a Century*), it's Britpop frippery at its best.



Urban Hymns

The Verve

1997

The Verve had actually split up amid feelings of disillusion and got back together when they made this – their third studio album. It may have come at the tailend of Britpop, but the unabashedly epic *Bittersweet Symphony* kicked off a big record that was unafraid to get tears rolling with the magnificence of *The Drugs Don't Work*.



In It for the Money

Supergrass

1997

Suede or Supergrass? Well both, but Supergrass was born just as the Britpop era kicked in, and they were aware of where they fitted ("as everyone's second favourite band," as they would later market themselves). This isn't the one with *Alright*, but its crisp melodies and adventurous spirit proved to be winners.



Liam Gallagher strikes a familiar pose as he sings: his head raised to meet the microphone and his hands behind his back. He also looks similar to John Lennon – his Beatles idol.

Justine Frischmann of Elastica performs at the V96 festival in Chelmsford. Justine also dated Damon Albarn, and her band's album, also called *Elastica*, was not only the fastest-selling British debut but a Mercury Music Prize nominee.

Pictured in 1995, Oasis (Noel and Liam Gallagher) had truly become rock 'n' roll stars with their first two albums, *Definitely Maybe* and *(What's the Story) Morning Glory?*, instantly lauded as classics.



Verve and Supergrass were rising from the local pub venues to the pages of *NME*. Once marginalised (Suede only got dropped in to perform *Animal Nitrates* on the Brit Awards in 1993 following accusations the organisers were failing to champion new music), Britpop was now mainstream.

WHAT'S THE STORY?

With Oasis, sometimes the fists rather than the music did the talking. It meant the tabloid showbiz editors who had, for so long, favoured production-line popstars, began to sit up and take notice. Frontman Liam Gallagher was newspaper box-office, mined for quotes and followed for his behaviour. Noel had his fair share of controversy too, once saying taking drugs was "like getting up and having a cup of tea."

But it was the quality of their songs that kept them at the top, and they almost became separated from the whole Britpop scene, such was their immense pulling power (their management team saw Britpop as parochial, and felt Oasis to be an international band). Despite that, a homegrown rift opened

"It was as much a battle between identity and culture as anything"

up between the working-class boys from Burnage, Manchester, and the wry middle-class London boys Blur. It was as much a battle between identity and culture as anything, one fought amid hurtling insults. This came despite Damon (who was dating Justine Frischmann of Elastica) declaring their 1995 Brit Award for Best Group should be shared with Oasis. Before long, the gloves were off.

At its height, it turned into a contrived Battle of the Bands that, if not a fight for a generation, was at least a distracting spat that even made it onto the *BBC Nine O'Clock News*. By that point, Oasis had followed *Definitely Maybe* and its popular roster of songs from *Supersonic* to *Live Forever*, with the release of *Some Might Say* – the Oasis single to get to Number 1. The band was getting ready to release *Roll With It* on 14 August 1995, but Blur (on Damon's suggestion) moved their original date of

Country House to clash with it. Blur's upbeat song sold 274,000 copies to Oasis's 216,000, and it stoked the rivalry.

But Oasis arguably had the last laugh that year. The album *(What's the Story) Morning Glory?* shot to the top slot in October, bringing the world *Wonderwall* and *Don't Look Back in Anger*. It became the second fastest-selling album in British history behind Michael Jackson's *Bad*.

Blur's *The Great Escape*, meanwhile, was widely acclaimed, but although it shot to Number 1, it failed to sell as many as Oasis's *(What's the Story) Morning Glory?*. The following year, Oasis played two nights at Knebworth Park in Hertfordshire before a combined audience of 250,000. More than 2.6 million people had applied for tickets.

SOMETHING CHANGED

But Britpop wasn't just Oasis and their Beatles fixation, drug habits, parkas and



penchant for singing with the microphone too high, just as it wasn't the posh southern kids of Blur, who were as tainted with hedonism as the rest of them. Pulp's seedy, righteous and awakening *Different Class* brought a much-needed cynicism in songs such as *Mis-Shapes*, *Sorted for E's & Wizz* and the anthemic, era-defining *Common People*. Bespectacled Jarvis Cocker was a quirky, witty, wry frontman, cementing Sheffield on the Britpop map. That he invaded the stage at the 1996 Brit Awards and showed his backside in protest at Michael Jackson's Christ-like performance of *Earth Song* was the icing on the cake for a British movement that had been born from a desire to dismiss the US.

By 1997, however, Britpop was about to wane. Oasis launched *Be Here Now*, and critics – stung by their scorn of (*What's the Story*) *Morning Glory?* – praised it wholeheartedly. But then TV presenter Chris Evans labelled the album a stinker on Channel 4's *TFI Friday*, and there appeared to be a concerted effort to push the flag-waving Britpop label aside by other bands. The days

of Noel's Union Flag guitar were coming to an end, and even efforts by Spice Girl Geri Halliwell to flaunt the colours on a mini-dress started to appear desperate. It was also the year Liam Gallagher and his wife, Patsy Kensit, had appeared on the front cover of *Vanity Fair* in the US – suddenly British bands wanted to be accepted by Americans. Cool Britannia, as it was now being dubbed, was feeling hijacked.

Even so, it was an utterly glorious period while it lasted, and let's not forget some of the true gems that 1997 also brought us, including Radiohead's *OK Computer* and The Verve's *Urban Hymns*. It had created new optimism and a fresh mood in the country, which Labour leader Tony Blair had looked to capitalise on in the general election that year.

Britpop was also fun and adventurous, with a feeling that new bands were emerging with a bang each week, and that a group of men or women, or even a combination of the two, could get together and achieve. It was, for so many people, as good as it could have been. If only it could have lived forever.

When Noel met Tony

Although the photographs show Tony Blair in an amiable conversation with a smiling Noel Gallagher, the invitation to Downing Street for the song-writing brain behind Oasis was as much a surprise for the prime minister as it was for everyone else. Taking place in 1997, the PM's spokesman, Alistair Campbell, later said Blair was worried Gallagher would trash the place. He didn't, but he later claimed he took cocaine in the toilet reserved for the Queen. Such revelations failed to dampen the dismay over the visit, however: many felt then (and still do) that Noel's hobnobbing attendance at the glitzy 'Cool Britannia' reception was a step too far. Mixing with the political elite was viewed as a nail in the coffin for Britpop.

GIRL POWER *VS* BOY BANDS

Recalling how boy bands rose to prominence during the 1990s, and how girl power beat them at their own game

The screams of anticipation as a boy band takes to the stage has always been deafening. But while it is a ritual that extends back decades, in the 1990s there was certainly a good number of clean-cut pretty boys to scream at. At the time, music industry executives had been falling over themselves to emulate the success of US record producer Maurice Starr who had worked so much magic with New Edition and the achingly cool New Kids on the Block in the 1980s. It may have meant there was almost a surplus of such groups on both sides of the Atlantic, but the scream-o-meter sure would fly off the scale for a good number of them.

THE NEW KIDS

One of the biggest boy bands was Take That, put together in the UK by casting agent Nigel Martin-Smith, who had noticed the global impact New Kids on the Block had been enjoying. Eventual band members Howard Donald and Mark Owen were already on his books as male models, while Gary Barlow was touring the clubs as a singer. The group was built around Barlow, and Jason Orange and Robbie Williams were also added. By 1992 – following three singles that failed to make the Top 40 – Take That finally broke through with *It Only Takes a Minute*. Once they got their first Number 1 in 1993 with *Pray*, there was no stopping them, and they hit the top slot with seven of their eight subsequent releases.

Like many boy bands of the era, Take That benefitted from slick styling and highly polished dance routines, as they sought to turn the heads of their mainly teenage female fans. Their erstwhile UK rivals for attention were the rap-influenced bad boys East 17, formed in 1991 and named after the postcode of their hometown of



NSYNC in 1997, with a young Justin Timberlake in yellow, was created to build on the success that the Backstreet Boys had been enjoying.

The Spice Girls in 1996 at the beginning of their highly successful career.





Destiny's Child took girl power further in 1998, with powerful songs and a stunning line-up of Beyoncé Knowles, Kelly Rowland and Michelle Williams.

Walthamstow. Viewed as grittier and more political, lead singer Brian Harvey ended up being sacked for saying he had once taken 12 ecstasy tablets and then driven. Yet with so much money invested in such manufactured groups, there was always a worry that trouble could be financially damaging.

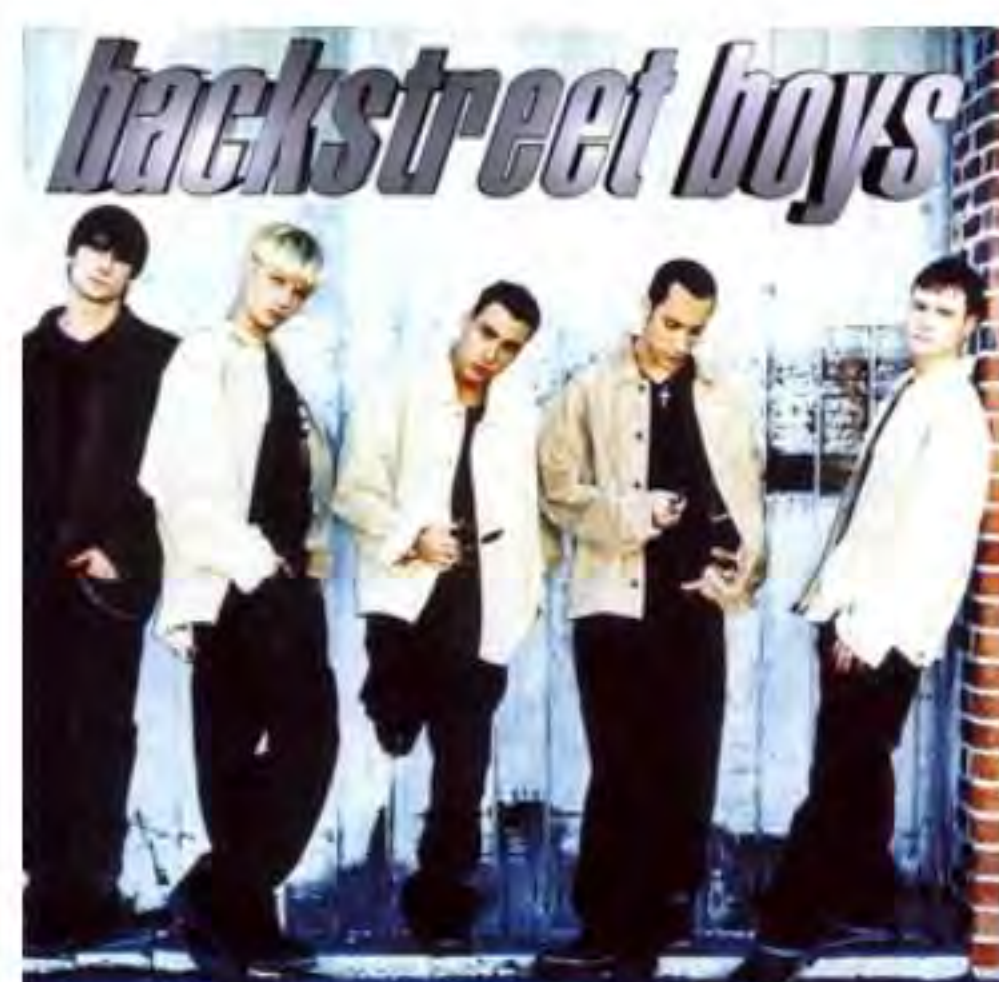
Bands were good at hiding problems. Members of Boyzone, the group formed as an Irish version of Take That by Louis Walsh, were later revealed to have had their differences but, to fans, Ronan Keating, Keith Duffy, Stephen Gateley, Mikey Graham and Shane Lynch were the perfect guys. Put together after adverts were placed in Irish newspapers, they released their first single, *Working My Way Back to You*, in Ireland in 1994. It peaked at Number 3 in the charts, and their next tune, *Love Me for a Reason*, was then launched globally, flying to the top, and reaching Number 2 in the UK. Their achievements were phenomenal.

GIRL POWER!

But success wasn't solely confined to the boys. In 1991, the all-girl trio TLC had burst onto the scene with the sexually edgy *Ain't 2 Proud 2 Beg*, and they went on to sell more than 65 million records and win five Grammy Awards in a career that ran throughout the decade with hits including *Creep*, *Waterfalls* and *No Scrubs*.

Meanwhile, the American R&B vocal group En Vogue was in its stride, conceived of as a modern-day Supremes by the

5 ESSENTIAL '90s GIRL/BOY BAND ALBUMS



Backstreet Boys

The Backstreet Boys brought their mix of hip-hop, R&B, rock and pop together in two different self-titled debut albums. The US version from 1997 is the best, packing all of the band's singalong chart tunes such as *Quit Playing Games (With My Heart)* and *All I Have to Give*.



Spice Girls

Britain's quintet of sassy girls dealt primarily with relationships over the course of this barnstorming album of catchy and uplifting ballads and pop songs. Boasting the zany debut single *Wannabe*, along with quintessential '90s tunes *Say You'll Be There* and *2 Become 1*, it was warm, classy and, above all, fun.



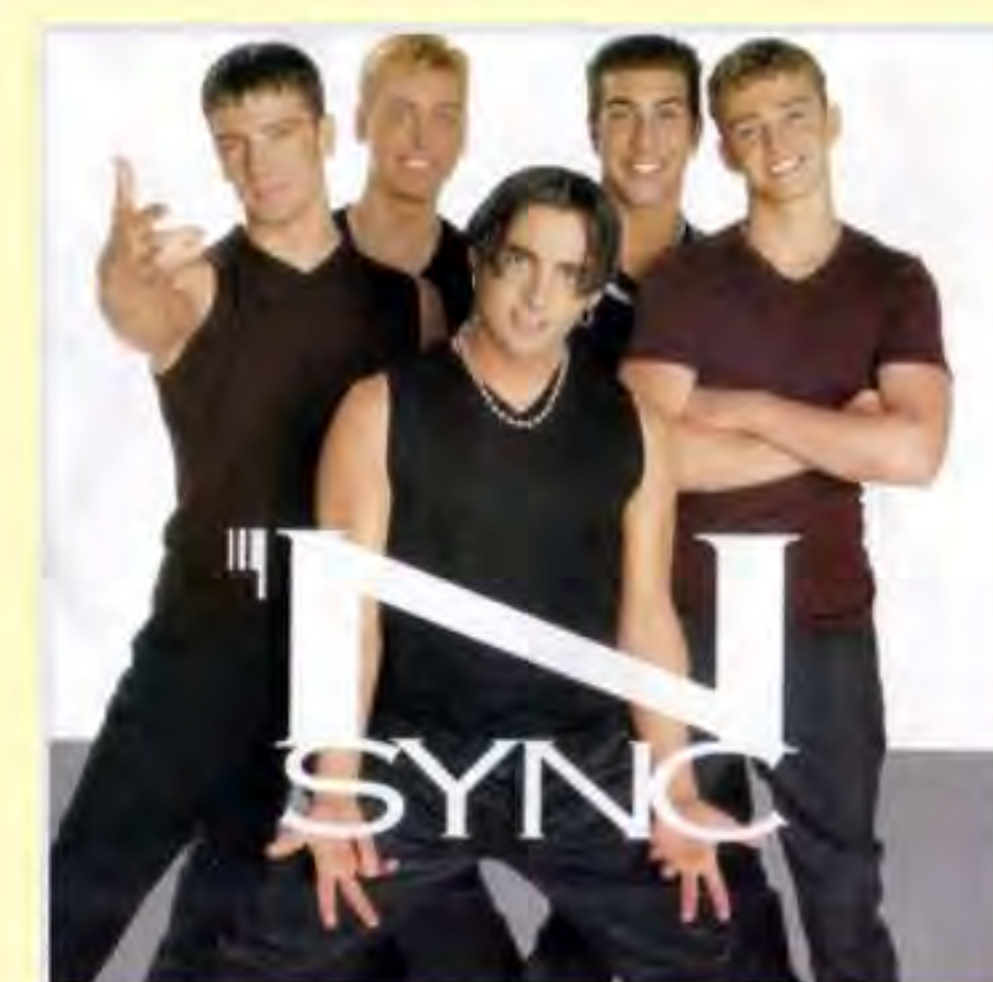
Everything Changes

This second album by Take That shines with its mature sound – a world away from the largely dance-pop debut *Take That & Party*. Providing six singles and four Number 1s, this was Take That at their most confident, prolific and talented selves, and while there were covers such as *Relight My Fire*, they were superbly done.



The Writing's on the Wall

As one of the best-selling R&B albums of all time, *The Writing's on the Wall* includes the Number 1 hits *Say My Name* and *Bills, Bills, Bills*. It's also the final album to contain the original band members. You can hear the hunger to inject fresh ideas and make an impression. It succeeds.



'N Sync

Justin Timberlake, JC Chasez, Joey Fatone, Chris Kirkpatrick and Lance Bass showed what they could do on this slow-burning album, and it's essential listening if only for a sense of music history. Wonderful R&B tracks such as *I Just Wanna Be With You* rub shoulders with techno jazz and wonderful harmonies.

THE SOUNDS OF THE '90s

production and writing duo Denzil Foster and Thomas McElroy. They formed the template for other female R&B groups of the 1990s, with Cindy Herron-Bragg, Dawn Robinton, Terry Ellis and Maxine Jones selling more than 20 million albums.

The biggest all-girl group of all, however, included Victoria Adams, Geri Halliwell, Melanie Brown, Emma Bunton and Melanie Chisholm, aka Posh, Ginger, Scary, Baby and Sporty – the Spice Girls. They arrived in the midst of Britpop and the Cool Britannia movement and, while heavily marketed, they had the personalities and the looks to endear them not to a market of lusting teenage boys (although there were many) but to millions of admiring girls.

The Spice Girls – the biggest girl group ever – were more than about the music, as catchy as *Wannabe*, *2 Become 1*, *Spice Up Your Life*, *Too Much*, *Stop* and all the rest proved to be. They may have been managed by a man, Simon Fuller, but they were brash

and bold, and able to talk directly to a female audience. It appears Geri was the engine room of the band, unafraid to speak out, which encouraged the other four to do the same. At the same time, each band member was equal, and they knew what they wanted to do and where they wanted to be.

They wrote their own songs, constructed the melodies, the videos and the dance routines, and sold 85 million albums across the world (*Spice*, *Spiceworld* and *Forever*). Some of the clothes they wore – such as Geri's Union Flag dress – became iconic, and the band was unafraid to explore merchandising and spin-off opportunities, such as the movie *Spice World*, commercials and documentaries. Not bad for a group that had originally been deemed derivative and talentless, cynically created as a female counterpart to Take That.

Indeed, the Spice Girls inspired a girl band revolution. There were B*Witched, Atomic Kitten, Hepburn and All Saints. The

latter included sisters Nicole and Natalie Appleton, and they had chart success from 1997 with the likes of *Never Ever*, *Under the Bridge* and *Lady Marmalade*. Meanwhile, Destiny's Child made a star of Beyoncé Knowles (*Bills, Bills, Bills* being the breakthrough). The music industry was suddenly confident that it could aim all-girl bands, as well as boy bands, at females.

BYE BYE BYE

That's not to say that the boy bands faded away – far from it. The Backstreet Boys released their debut album in 1996, a year



Take That in 1991 (from left to right): Robbie Williams, Jason Orange, Mark Owen, Gary Barlow and Howard Donald.



The all-girl band All Saints (Nicole Appleton, Shaznay Lewis, Natalie Appleton and Melanie Blatt) was launched by the 1997 single *Never Ever*.



Ginger leaves the Spice Girls

The Spice Girls had released their debut *Wannabe* in 1996 but, two years later, Geri Halliwell, aka Ginger Spice, confirmed speculation that she was going to walk away, leaving the other four band members behind. As blows go, it was on a par with Robbie Williams quitting Take That in 1995, and a statement from the remaining quartet said they were “upset and saddened,” although they vowed to carry on. Geri said she had suffered from exhaustion and, as if to underline that, she did not start her solo career until a year later, debuting with the catchy single *Look at Me*.



▲ American boyband Backstreet Boys in 1995. The group's sound was heavily influenced by R&B.

▲ Geri Halliwell wore this Union Flag dress at the Brit Awards in 1997, towards the end of the Britpop and Cool Britannia era.

after their first single *We've Got It Goin' On* and around the same time as *Quit Playing Games (with My Heart)* was unleashed. The band was formed by American businessman Lou Pearlman, who also created NSYNC, the two bands dominating the music scene to a large extent in the late 1990s. Many of the songs cast doubt on relationships, and highlighted the hopelessness of love. They even questioned boy bands themselves ("Am I everything you need..." the Backstreet Boys sang in *Everybody (Backstreet's Back)*).

Yet if they were feeling threatened by the rise and power of the girls, the truth is that these later-decade boy bands were screamed over in greater numbers than ever before, achieving enviable glory and longevity. Some also matured: Backstreet Boys began

singing pop but moved to R&B. They grew in confidence too: 98 Degrees would write their own material, and they formed independently rather than relying on a record label to put them together.

But there were always inevitable strains. Robbie Williams sought to break out of the boy-band mould and become friends with Oasis, joining the band on stage at Glastonbury in 1995. Noel Gallagher, however, referred to him as "that fat dancer from Take That." There were also pressures on stalwarts to remain fresh in the face of bands such as The Moffatts, Hanson, LFO and 5ive. Everyone knew that when boy bands faded, they were dumped and replaced; so out went Boyzone, in came Westlife – the band well known for standing up on a key change in what fast became a cliché for the 2000s.

Girls were not immune either: music grew tired of their bands for a spell, but that was in part down to the industry thrusting so many on the public. In 1999, around 20 emerged, and in 2000, the industry was preparing to launch another 35. But that in itself was a legacy of Girl Power, and the confidence on display. Now if only someone would clear up what zig-a-zig-ah actually means, we'd all sleep much easier. It's enough to make you want to scream.

HIP HOP: THE GOLDEN AGE



The 1980s were an impressive time for the genre, but the 1990s presented a chance for a new generation of artists to evolve it

The revolutionary and inspirational work of Public Enemy, NWA, Run DMC, Eric B and Rakim, Afrikaa Bambaataa and more put hip hop into the hearts, minds and ears of fans across the world in the '80s, yet the '90s provided a launch pad for many artists to innovate and showcase their skills. While this big melting pot of styles divided audiences at times, there was no denying that music fans were spoilt for choice with the offerings.

On the one hand, you had Fresh Prince, MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice producing – let's say – accessible tracks that raised the profile of the genre to mainstream audiences. Yet, on the other, groups such as the East Coast Native Tongues collective were positively influencing the music community with socially conscious hip hop. Artists such as the Jungle Brothers, De La Soul and A Tribe Called Quest were hitting fans with fun, laid-back, sample-heavy tracks.

Staten Island's Wu-Tang Clan took the creative sampling one step further by including audio clips from their favourite kung-fu films

at the time. *Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)* is a heavy and utterly unique album full of personality, and is still regarded by many as a classic today.

MUSICIAN, INFLECTIN' COMPOSITION OF PAIN

Nas's take on the genre, meanwhile, took social and political commentary to a new level. Much like Public Enemy and KRS-One, his debut album *Illmatic* addressed important issues using poetic lyrics, skilful composition and innovative production techniques. His songs described a reality that many fans could relate to. Biggie pushed this a little further with his more aggressive approach to rap, often writing about his first-hand experiences of working as a dealer and growing up in Brooklyn.

On the West Coast, meanwhile, Dr Dre was making great headway with his incredible debut solo album *The Chronic*. Snoop also made his first appearance on it, marking what would be a key part of Dre's career in the future: producing

tracks and working with talented, like-minded artists. Snoop went on to release the hugely successful *Doggystyle* a year later, and his laid-back style and creative rhymes gained him industry praise and respect.

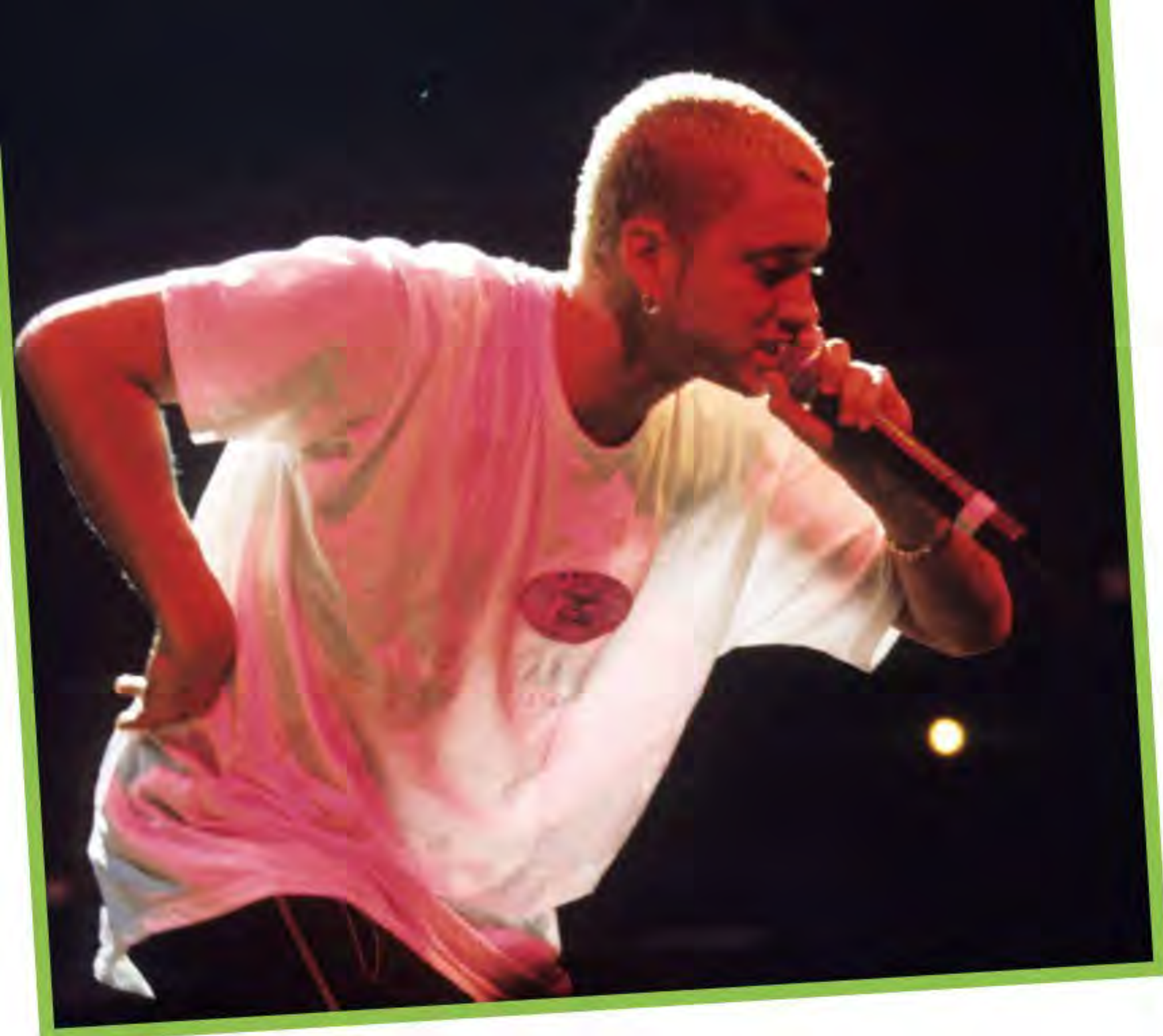
EAST/WEST BEEF

Nevertheless, while the brilliance of this genre is in its authenticity, diversity and freedom of expression, rifts were appearing and feuds were forming. The East/West Coast divide was present in the lyrics and on the streets, caused by a number of factors, including media coverage, gang culture and record label competition. One rivalry that has since become legend was between Tupac and Biggie. Once close friends, the pair became enemies, swapping insults on diss tracks *Who Shot Ya?* and *Hit 'Em Up*. Sadly, the world lost this artistic talent when the two were killed in separate shooting incidents. Tupac Shakur passed away on 13 September 1996, while Christopher Wallace, aka Notorious BIG



▲ Dr Dre and Snoop established West Coast gangsta rap as a major force in the '90s.

◀ A Tribe Called Quest were responsible for two of the best hip hop albums of the decade, 1991's *Low End Theory* and 1993's *Midnight Marauders*.



▲ Eminem burst onto the scene at the end of the '90s with the Dr Dre-produced single *My Name Is*.

or Biggie, died on 9 March 1997. The whole industry and its fans mourned their loss.

Outside this rivalry, though, other artists emerged and took the hip-hop world by force. Missy Elliott's first album *Supa Dupa Fly*, marked a huge change for female representation in the industry. Not only was her style effortlessly cool, but her music was edgy and intelligent too. Early work saw her collaborate with artists including Timbaland, Li'l Kim, Aaliyah, Busta Rhymes and even Eminem.

The Beastie Boys continued to have massive success with their albums *Ill Communication* and *Hello Nasty*, while Jurassic 5 shared its



2Pac and his rival Notorious B.I.G. were tragically murdered in 1996 and 1997 respectively. Their deaths followed a long-running feud between their record labels.

With its kung fu-inspired samples and raw beats, the Wu-Tang Clan delivered one of the most original debut hip hop albums of the '90s.



first self-titled debut: a relaxed, fun and soulful spin on hip hop. Its style, while remarkable and distinct, harked back to the early, more carefree days of the genre – no doubt inspired by De La Soul and A Tribe Called Quest.

THE REAL SLIM SHADY

As the decade came to a close, the powerhouse that was Dre's Aftermath record label introduced something new to hip hop fans: Eminem. *Slim Shady EP* combined Marshall Mathers' distinct vocals and lyrical talent with the production genius of Dr Dre. While Mathers won a Grammy award for it, Dre

didn't stop there: on 16 November 1999, he released his second studio album *2001*. His collaborations with Eminem, Snoop, Xzibit and more reminded the industry – as if it was necessary – that he was a true creative force to be reckoned with.

5 ESSENTIAL '90s HIP HOP ALBUMS



The Chronic

Dr Dre

1992

It's impossible to measure the impact and influence *The Chronic* has had on the music industry since its launch. The album is incredible – like nothing else we'd ever heard before or since. There's a reason why Dr Dre later went on to become hip hop's first ever billionaire.



Midnight Marauders

A Tribe Called Quest

1993

The third studio album from A Tribe Called Quest, *Midnight Marauders* blends a medley of samples in with fun, intelligent and positive lyrics. Sounding slick, fresh and altogether original, it's considered a classic album by many, and a cornerstone for the hip hop genre as a whole.



Illmatic

Nas

1994

Nas is known for his poetic lyrics, and *Illmatic* doesn't disappoint. His debut album was a massive success: it showcased his passion for authenticity, artistic integrity, creative, rhythmic delivery, and high production values. *N.Y. State of Mind*, *Life's a B*****, *Represent...* hip hop doesn't get much better.



Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)

Wu-Tang Clan

1993

While many artists were sampling old-school jazz, disco, folk or blues tracks, Wu-Tang took it further to include snippets from imported kung-fu films, said to be from RZA's collection. *Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)* is a blend of personality, lyrical rhythm and flow with incredible sampled source material.

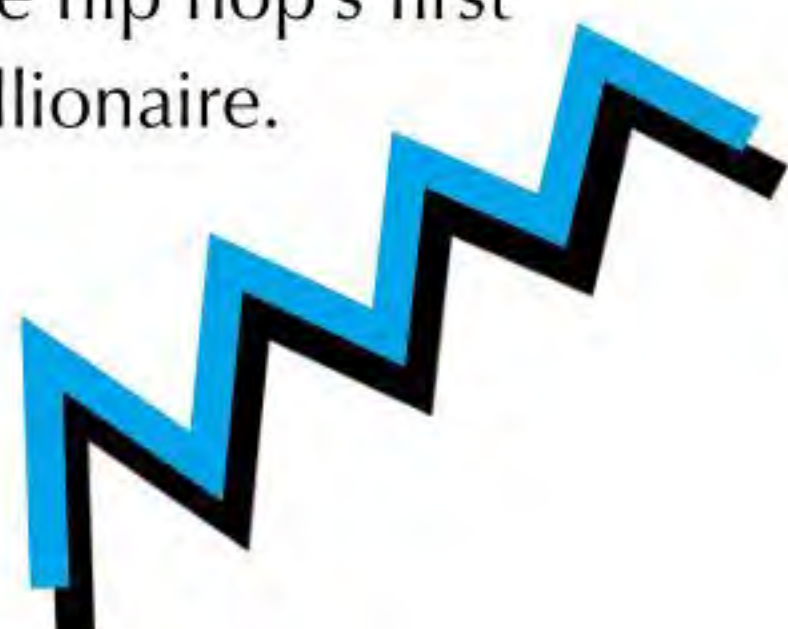


Aquemini

Outkast

1998

Hailing from Georgia, Outkast truly put the Deep South's hip hop scene on the map with their third studio album. Combining Big Boi's southern drawl with Andre 3000's high-speed flows, the album was a laid-back masterpiece with production heavily influenced by the funk and soul sounds of the '60s and '70s.



THE BIRTH OF GRUNGE

How this raw, unpolished sound helped to define a generation

Grunge started out of the Seattle music scene at the end of the '80s and early '90s. It quickly captured the hearts and minds of many music fans at the time, helping to define the era and a generation. Popularised by record label Sub Pop, this musical genre had many influences: chiefly heavy metal, punk and alternative rock, including – but not limited to – Black Sabbath, Led Zeppelin, Metallica, Pixies, Sonic Youth, Buzzcocks, David Bowie, Melvins, Sex Pistols, Velvet Underground, The Slits, Vaselines and Joy Division, but also even as far reaching as the Beatles and 1940s' talented folk/blues singer Lead Belly. The result? A raw, unpolished sound like nothing the world had ever seen or heard before.

The 'Seattle sound' was first coined by indie record label Sub Pop as a way of marketing the stripped-down, consistent production techniques of its audio engineer, Jack Endino. An established musician in his own right, Endino worked on various Sub Pop bands' albums, including Mudhoney's *Superfuzz Bigmuff*, Soundgarden's *Screaming Life*, Screaming Trees' *Buzz Factory* and, of course, Nirvana's first album, *Bleach*. Around the same time, fellow Seattle-formed band Pearl Jam

were also beginning to find success with their powerful tracks. This distinct approach and style attracted the interest of the British music press, and went on to influence bands and artists across the world.

COMPELLING LYRICAL CONTENT

Supporting the sludgy, grunge-rock sound was often a set of intelligent yet rather melancholy lyrics covering topics such as political commentary, difficult relationships, drug and sexual abuse, abortion, anxiety, depression, suicide and death. One of Pearl Jam's tracks, *Black*, was so personal to the band, in fact, that they refused to issue it as a single or make a music video for it. Yet despite the heavy subject matters, the personal connection with the music, and the minds that made it, only made the fans love it more.

AS A TREND, AS A FRIEND

This connection with its fans also helped to evolve grunge as a strong fashion movement of that era. Fans were eager to replicate the 'uniform' of their favourite bands and artists, which was defined by long (often unwashed) hair, checked flannel shirts, T-shirts, jeans and

scuffed-up DMs. Described as 'the elegantly wasted look' by the press at that time, it even influenced the catwalk – most famously in Marc Jacobs' spring/summer 1993 show for Perry Ellis. What started out as Kurt Cobain's granny dress or thick lumberjack shirts evolved into expensive chiffon and cashmere counterparts. Naturally, it went down like a lead balloon with the fashion industry, and Jacobs was promptly fired for this, but the fact it was even included demonstrates the power and influence of this sub-culture on the mainstream.

REACHING THE MASSES

While other grunge bands experienced success, nothing could compare to the impact of Nirvana's second studio album, *Nevermind*. Noticeably different in production styles than *Bleach*, this was due to a number of factors: the band had a new, kick-ass drummer in the form of Dave Grohl; Nirvana was signed to a new record label, Geffen, and as such, production of the album was handled by Butch Vig; Kurt's love of the Beatles even meant he wanted to use similar production techniques to the Fab Four in the studio. *Nevermind* was released in 1991, and the music scene has never been the same since. Kurt Cobain, Dave Grohl and Krist Novoselic quickly shot to fame, and brought the raw sounds and DIY spirit to the masses. Nothing could compare to the opening of *Smells Like Teen Spirit* and the tracks that followed. Cobain's often-haunting vocals, Grohl's impressive drumming, and the heavy, grungy guitar sounds made for a heady combination.

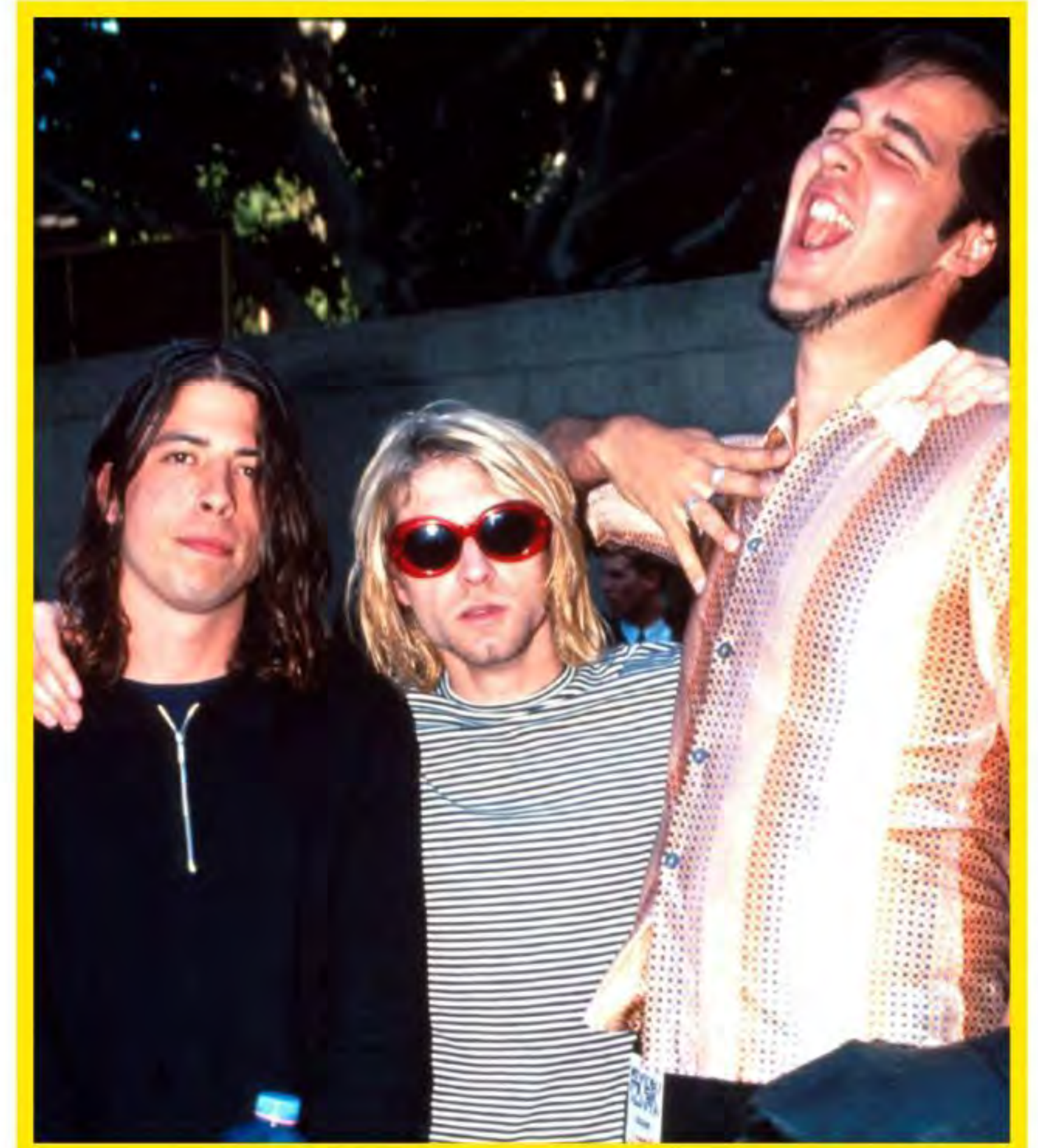
Sadly, Kurt's heroin addiction was an unwelcome fourth member of the band, and slowly consumed him until his tragic suicide at the age of 27 on 5 April 1994. News of his death understandably shook the industry and devastated fans. While arguably grunge died too at that point, Cobain became an icon for the genre, and his talents and work continue to inspire people to this day. Grunge helped to open the doors to Queens of the Stone Age, White Stripes, Arcade Fire, plus many more. And, for that, we are truly thankful.



Nirvana lead singer Kurt Cobain (centre) tragically committed suicide in 1994 at the age of 27.



Nirvana's 1991 album *Nevermind* was a surprise commercial success and introduced the mainstream to grunge for the first time.



Mixing heavy metal elements with the 'Seattle sound', Alice in Chains had two Number 1 albums in the US during the '90s.

Like many of the best grunge bands of the '90s, Pearl Jam dealt with a range of issues and subjects, both social and personal, in their lyrics.



5 ESSENTIAL '90s GRUNGE ALBUMS



Bleach Nirvana

1989
Okay, so technically *Bleach* is not a '90s grunge album, since it came out in 1989. However, it *is* grunge and was huge in the '90s, so no 'top 5' in this genre would be complete without it. Nirvana's debut studio album is 40-odd minutes of raw, unassuming grunge gold. Turn it up and listen in full.



Nevermind Nirvana

1991
Nothing could have quite prepared Kurt, Dave and Krist for the success of *Nevermind*. Reaching beyond the grunge audiences and launching them into the hearts and minds of the mainstream, *Nevermind* successfully manages to simultaneously act as a soundtrack to the '90s and a classic masterpiece in its own right. Genius.



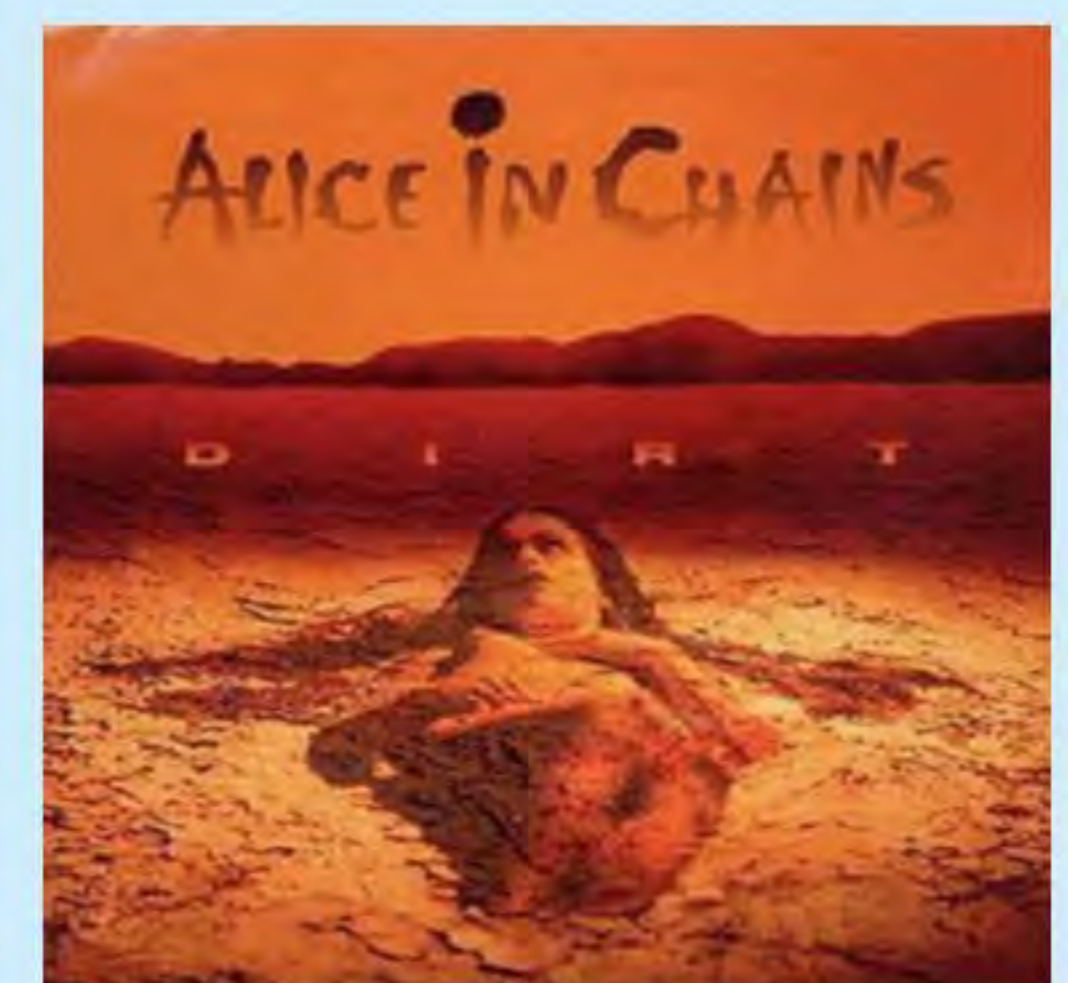
Superunknown Soundgarden

1994
The fourth studio album from Chris Cornell and co is a worthy addition to any grunge fan's record collection. From the figuratively heavy lyrics to Chris's powerful vocals and everything in between, *Superunknown* is a truly fantastic body of work – not least because it contains the inimitable single *Black Hole Sun*.



Ten Pearl Jam

1991
When you think of Pearl Jam, which song springs to mind first? *Even Flow*? *Alive*? *Once*? Either way, they're all off the *Ten* album. While it arguably lacks the punk edge that exists in other much-loved grunge bands, Pearl Jam played a powerful part in the music scene at that time and, for this reason, they're in.



Dirt Alice in Chains

1992
Deliberating over this final choice was tough, but there's no doubt Alice in Chains' *Dirt* was instrumental (pun intended) in helping to establish the genre. Listening to the first few tracks, you can tell the band was heavily influenced by Sabbath; however, the end result was a breath of fresh, grimy air for music fans at the time.

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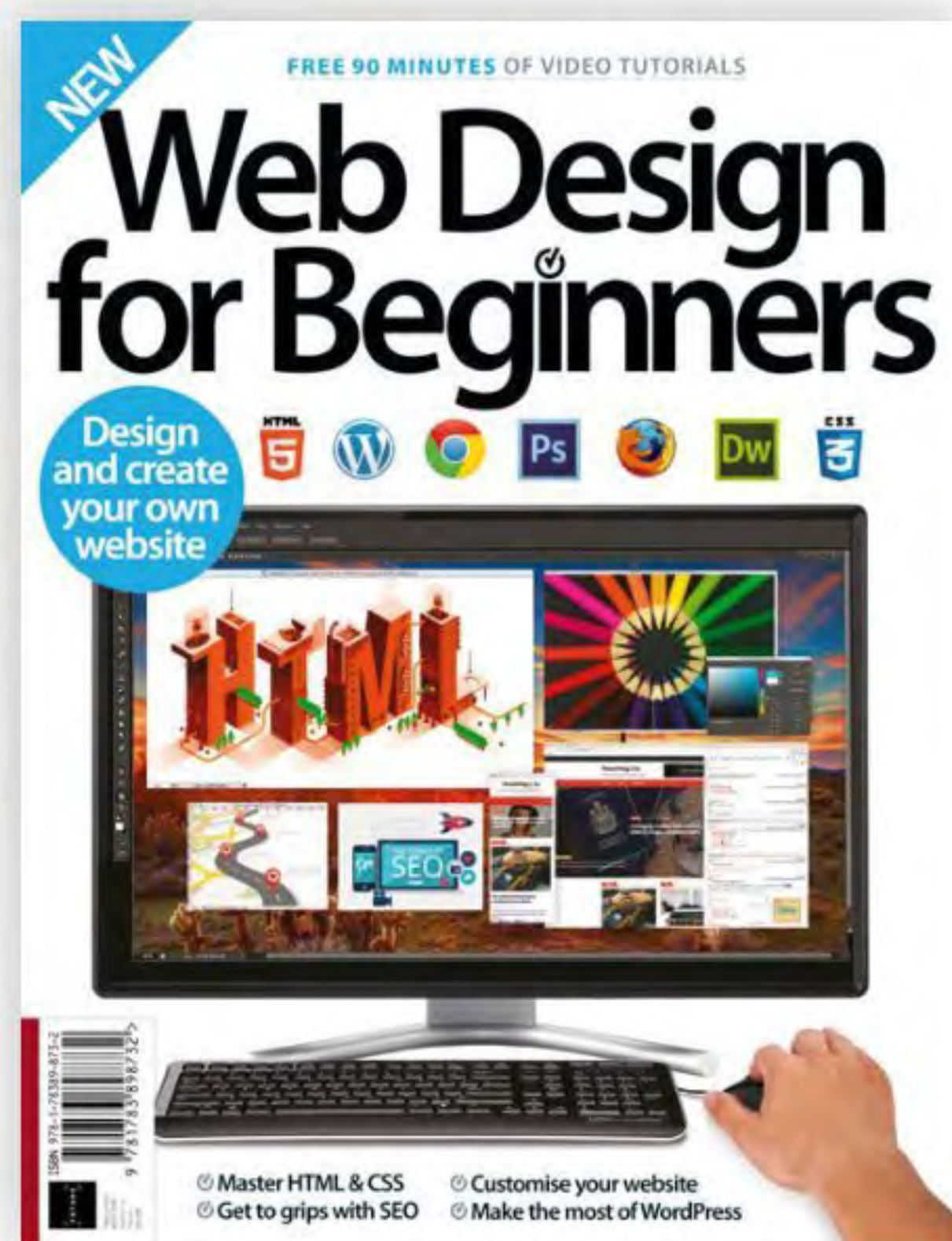


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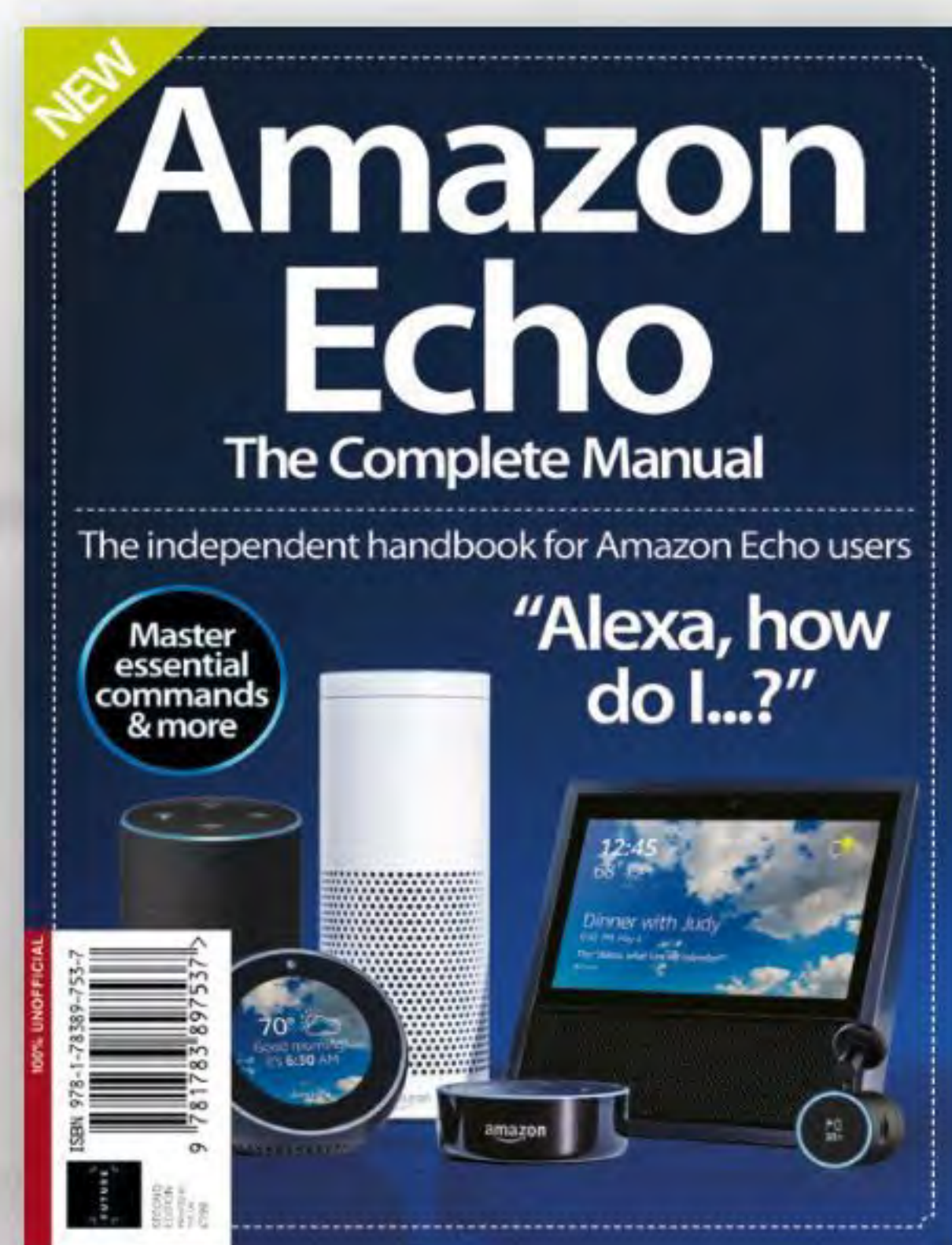


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